

# THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #98, February 1 - 21, 2007  
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



FRANK REYNOSO

**DISASTER  
CAPITALISM  
STRIKES THAILAND**  
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**HOW TO MAKE A  
SLUMLORD REPAIR  
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**BISEXUALITY  
ROCKS!**  
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[www.indypendent.org](http://www.indypendent.org) • [nyc.indymedia.org](http://nyc.indymedia.org)





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### WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 150 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

*The Indypendent* is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Indypendent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

### VOLUNTEER STAFF:

Nicholas Allanach, Chris Anderson, Steven Arnerich, Kazembe Balagun, Gino Barzizza, Charlie Bass, Bennett J. Baumer, Leila Binder, Jed Brandt, Mike Burke, José Carmona, Antrim Caskey, Kepfram Cauley, Susan Chenelle, Linnea Covington, Ellen Davidson, Lauren Denitzio, Ryan Dunsmuir, Jeff Faerber, David Ferris, Karen Fu, Leo Garcia, Sandrya George, Neela Ghoshal, Antonio Golan, Samantha Gorelick, Liana Grey, A.K. Gupta, Leijia Hanrahan, Mary Heglar, Dennis Ho, Irina Ivanova, Gillian Kalsen, Ruth Kelton, Ula Kuras, Jessica Lee, Gary Martin, Diane Mason, Edgar Mata, Clark Merrefield, Nik Moore, Mary Heglar, Ana Nogueira, Erica Patino, Donald Paneth, Nicholas Powers, Frank Reynoso, Ann Schneider, Andrew Stern, Sarah Stuteville, John Tarleton, Xavier Tayo, Erin Thompson, Chloe Tribich, Carly Triche, Hannah Vahl, Stephanie Wakefield, Matthew Wasserman, Steven Wishnia, Amy Wolf & Christina Zawerucha

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## february

Please send event announcements to  
[indyevents@gmail.com](mailto:indyevents@gmail.com).

### ONGOING

Buddhist Meditation Classes:  
In 4 boroughs. Call 718-496-5514 or for  
Bkln & S.I. Info:  
[www.meditateinbrooklyn.org](http://www.meditateinbrooklyn.org);  
Qns Info: [meditateinqueens.org](http://meditateinqueens.org);  
Bx Info: [www.kadampanyc.org](http://www.kadampanyc.org)

### FRI FEB 9 & 16

8pm • \$10; \$7.50 seniors & students  
SCREENPEACE: An Antiwar Film Festival  
sponsored by the War Resisters League  
and the Brecht Forum featuring an eclectic  
look at the past 20 years in antiwar films  
plus discussions with filmmakers.  
Brecht Forum, 451 West St. (bet. Bank &  
Bethune). Tkts: 212-228-0450,  
[warresisters.org](http://warresisters.org).  
212-242-4201 or [brechtforum.org](http://brechtforum.org)

### FEB I-II

\$15; \$10 seniors & students w/ ID  
PERFORMANCE: "SPLIT ENDS," a show  
about the relationship between women of  
African ancestry and their hair.  
La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club  
74A E. 4th St. (bet. 2nd & Bowery)  
212-475-7710 or [lamama.org](http://lamama.org)

### SAT FEB 3

2pm  
RALLY: SAVE THE VEGAN INSTITUTION  
WHOLE EARTH BAKERY as it is  
scheduled to permanently shut down on  
3/31. To be held at Tompkins Sq. Park,  
near 7th St. bet. Ave. A & B. Please RSVP:  
[info@humanenyc.org](mailto:info@humanenyc.org) or 212-889-0303

4-7pm • Donations Accepted  
CITIZENS HEARING: Expert witnesses to  
support & defend Lt. Ehren K. Watada &  
his decision to resist deployment to Iraq.  
Brooklyn Law School, please RSVP to  
[nlg.bls.mil@gmail.com](mailto:nlg.bls.mil@gmail.com)  
[nyc@worldcantwait.org](mailto:nyc@worldcantwait.org) or 212-969-0772

### MON FEB 5

6pm • Free  
TALK: REPORT FROM THE FRONT –  
BOLIVIA: Workers & Indigenous  
Peoples United in Struggle. Sponsored by

Center for Study of Working Class Life.  
Stony Brook Manhattan,  
401 Park Ave. So. (28th St), 2nd Fl.  
631-632-7536

Time TBA  
DEMO/PRESS CONFERENCE/FORUM:  
PROTEST INTERNATIONAL DIAMOND  
CONVENTION IN NY.  
NYC Hilton, 1335 Ave. of the Americas  
(bet. 53rd & 54th). Forum to be held later  
on at the Church of the Village  
201 W. 13th St.  
215-387-0919, [info@apscuhuru.org](mailto:info@apscuhuru.org) &  
[boycottediamonds.net](http://boycottediamonds.net)

### TUE FEB 6

7pm • Free  
JUSTICE DELAYED IS JUSTICE DENIED:  
Hear from wrongfully convicted and  
recently exonerated speakers from New  
York State. *Sponsored by Campaign to End  
the Death Penalty and New Yorkers  
Against the Death Penalty.*  
National Black Theater,  
2031 5th Ave. @ 125th St.  
718-701-4580 or [nyc@nodeathpenalty.org](mailto:nyc@nodeathpenalty.org)

7-9pm • Donation  
BENEFIT: 31 YEARS OF INJUSTICE TO to  
commemorate the 31st anniversary of the  
arrest of Leonard Peltier to include music,  
history, spoken word, legal updates, live  
radio interviews & auction.  
Intl. Action Center, 55 W. 17th St., 5th Fl.  
*Sponsored by Leonard Peltier Support  
Group & Leonard Peltier Defense Cmt.*  
212-633-6646 or [info@leonardpeltier.net](mailto:info@leonardpeltier.net)

### THU FEB 8

7pm • Free  
FILM & DISCUSSION: HOW TO OUST A  
PRESIDENT. See the video *Oust!* about the  
Filipino people's movement, which succeeded  
in ousting a corrupt president in 2001.  
Followed by discussion. *Sponsored by  
Network in Solidarity with the People of  
the Philippines & World Can't Wait Jackson  
Heights.*  
Diversity Center of Queens,  
76-11 37th Ave., 2nd Fl., Jackson Heights.  
212-561-1567 or [nispop.org](mailto:nispop.org) &  
[worldcantwait.net](http://worldcantwait.net)

### FRI FEB 9

Snacks: 7pm • \$3  
Film: 7:30pm • \$2  
VIDEO NIGHT AT FREEDOM HALL:  
*MILITARY MYTHS* exposes tactics  
of military recruiting targeted at youth and  
the realities of military service. Followed  
by discussion. *Sponsored by the Freedom  
Socialist Party and Radical Women.*  
113 W. 128 St. 212-222-0633

### SAT FEB 10

1-2:30pm  
PROTEST: HAVE A HEART RALLY AGAINST FUR  
*Sponsored by Caring Activists Against Fur.*  
Saks 5th Ave., 611 5th Ave. at 52nd St.  
[info@caafgroup.com](mailto:info@caafgroup.com) or [caafgroup.com](http://caafgroup.com)

### SUN FEB 11

11am • \$10 (no one turned away for lack of funds)  
SOCIALIST WOMEN'S CONFERENCE: WOMEN  
AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY. *Hosted  
by the Party for Socialism and Liberation.*  
Childcare & refreshments provided.  
CULTURARTE, 260 Audubon Ave. (at 178 St.).  
212-694-8762 or  
[nyc@socialismandliberation.org](mailto:nyc@socialismandliberation.org)

3pm • Free  
FILM SCREENING: *CONGO: WHITE KING,  
RED RUBBER, BLACK DEATH.* Film  
detailing how King Leopold II of Belgium  
turned Congo into his own private colony  
from 1885 to 1908.  
AJ Muste Room,  
339 Lafayette St. (bet. Bleecker & Bond),  
3rd Fl.

### FEB 12 – 18

ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK 2007: Events  
coordinated throughout the city includ-  
ing lectures, panel discussions, cultural  
events, teach-ins and protests towards  
ending occupation and colonization of  
Gaza and the West Bank and toward the  
implementation of the right of return and  
full equality for Palestinian citizens of  
Israel. Full schedule at:  
[endisraeliapartheid.net](http://endisraeliapartheid.net).  
[israeliapartheidweek@yahoo.com](mailto:israeliapartheidweek@yahoo.com).

### THU FEB 15

6:30pm • Free  
TALK/BOOK SIGNING: *The Radical &*

*Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham  
Lincoln & the Triumph of Antislavery  
Politics* by Jim Oakes  
Cooper Union Great Hall,  
7 E. 7th St bet. 3rd & 4th Ave.  
212-353-4158, [cooper.edu](mailto:cooper.edu) or  
[jolene@cooper.edu](mailto:jolene@cooper.edu).

### SAT FEB 17

9am-7pm  
FOUNDING CONFERENCE OF THE  
MOVEMENT FOR A DEMOCRATIC  
SOCIETY. All-day schedule of events to  
confirm the sister organization to the  
revived Students for a Democratic Society  
at The New School.  
[studentsforademocraticsociety.org](http://studentsforademocraticsociety.org).

### THU FEB 22

7-9pm • \$30-\$50 sliding scale  
(no one turned away for lack of funds)  
FUNDRAISER: ANDOLAN – ORGANIZING  
SOUTH ASIAN WORKERS ANNUAL  
FUNDRAISING EVENT featuring preview of  
Yoni ki Baat, the South Asian version of the  
Vagina Monologues.  
A.I.R. gallery, 511 W. 25th St., Ste. 301.  
[monishabajaj@gmail.com](mailto:monishabajaj@gmail.com).

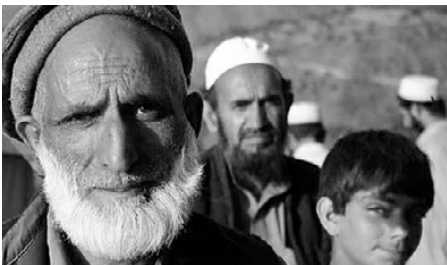
### FEB 23 – 25

FESTIVAL: *IT'S ALL ABOUT MEE (MEDIA,  
EXPRESSION & EDUCATION).* Effort to bring  
about broader understanding of the power  
of Hip-Hop to educate and empower the  
community. *Sponsored by Hip-Hop  
Association & Urban Word NYC.*  
*Please register.*  
Brooklyn Community Arts &  
Media High School,  
7 Tompkins Ave. 3rd Fl.  
212-500-5970  
[haed.net](http://haed.net) and [hiphopassociation.org](http://hiphopassociation.org) or  
[itsallaboutmee@hiphopassociation.org](mailto:itsallaboutmee@hiphopassociation.org).

### SAT FEB 24

10am • 7pm  
4TH ANNUAL GRASSROOTS MEDIA  
CONFERENCE: Media and Movements  
Beyond Borders. The largest annual grass-  
roots media justice conference. More than  
40 workshops on various topics.  
New School University,  
65 5th Ave. (at 13th St.)  
[nycgrassrootsmedia.org](http://nycgrassrootsmedia.org), 917-279-4344 or  
[max@nycgrassrootsmedia.org](mailto:max@nycgrassrootsmedia.org).

## letters to the editor



### THOUGHTS ON PAKISTAN

*In response to a first-person article by Sarah  
Stuteville analyzing western journalists' treatment  
of Pakistan ("Reflections from Pakistan," Jan. 10,  
2007), many Pakistanis weighed in on  
Indypendent.org with their own feelings about how  
the West and its media perceive their country.*

It's true that America sees her own reflection  
in Pakistan. The media projects it the way it suits  
them and their customers. Who wants to know if  
Pakistan has eight of 15 highest mountains in  
the world? Who wants to know it is home to the  
most ancient Buddha disciples? Who wants to  
know it's home to the ancient 2700 BC Moen-jo-  
daro Indus civilization?... When burning Bush  
effigies with American flags, with bearded men  
shouting slogans against the West sells hot – No  
Questions Asked!

—ANONYMOUS

Media is obsessed with Pakistan. Almost all the  
stories are negative. I never understand when they

show the video clip, it always starts by a starving  
donkey or camel crossing the road. What [does] a  
donkey have to do with it?

... If they can't find a donkey for some rea-  
son they must find a bearded man screaming  
Allah hu Akbak – God is great – screaming  
hate and anger at America, and if they can't  
find this man, they must find a poor woman in  
a burka crossing the road. I myself have lived  
in very remote cities of America, such as  
Goodwill, Oklahoma, Stillwater, Texas. ... Only  
difference I saw was a hat, no turban. They all  
carry guns in their truck and they don't like  
brown or black people up until now. —KK

Thank you. The article gave an interesting  
insight into American stereotypes. ... [Pakistan]  
has a great potential, but never utilized. The only  
way is to give the people a chance to prove them-  
selves. As long as self-appointed dictators are  
going to portray illusive images about the country  
in order to remain important in the eyes of the U.S.  
government and to keep a hold on the local polit-  
ical scenario, Pakistan has no chance of winning a  
respectable position. —AHSAN

Ahsan stop being an apologist! The U.S. is  
crumbling in its own home-grown fabricated  
problems! I tell you this media would change its  
stance as soon as the reliance on Pakistani prod-  
ucts and services would increase. Same was the  
case with India during Cold War. Look at it now,  
you'd hardly find a negative story on India though

the Indian state is similar to that of Pakistan. —  
ANONYMOUS

Bravo. Perhaps it's the first time I've seen an  
honest reporting piece by a Western traveler or  
rather an American. I fully endorse the writer's  
views about Western media's "Cheap Selling" psy-  
che, as if they are reporting for a cheap tabloid. ...  
If you want to see true picture of Pakistan, just  
come to Karachi, home to every Pakistani. It's a  
mosaic of culture, a blend of people you will find  
across every corner of Pakistan. Come and see the  
contrast of modern, traditional and colonial build-  
ings and the contrast of culture shared by the peo-  
ple who live here, yet bonded together.

—SAJID SAEED

### IPA CORRECTION

As the former associate director supervising  
the IPA's editorial programs, including NY-IPA, I  
would like to ask you to make a correction and  
clarification ("The IPA's Domino Effect: The Enron  
of Indie Media Leaves Publications in a Pinch,"  
Jan. 10, 2007). ... NY-IPA is not housing the  
George Washington Williams Fellowship or the  
Campus Journalism Project. Instead, they have  
also spun off under my direction as an independ-  
ent entity called New Voices in Independent  
Journalism, based in San Francisco.

—LINDA JUE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
NEW VOICES IN INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM  
*letters are continued on page 15*



# Hugo Heats Up the City

BY MARY HEGLAR

For the first time in years, residents of Spofford Hills, a housing cooperative in the South Bronx, won't feel the winter chill inside their building.

"This year, there is heat. In years past, forget about it. This building was frozen!" said Celia Martinez, a 74-year-old grandmother who lives in the housing cooperative.

Martinez's good fortune is a gift from Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's leftist president. After providing subsidized heating oil at a 40 percent discount last winter as a pilot project at several South Bronx housing cooperatives, CITGO, the U.S. subsidiary of Venezuela's state-owned oil company, has expanded the program to all five boroughs and looks to provide as much as 25 million gallons of discounted heating oil to as many as 100,000 low-income New York City households.

As of November 2006, the going rate for heating oil was \$2.27 per gallon. For Martinez, who lives alone and survives on a monthly Social Security check and a Supplemental Security



**CELIA MARTINEZ** of the South Bronx can now afford to stay warm in the winter thanks to subsidized heating oil provided by Venezuela. *PHOTO: DENNIS W. HO*

Income (SSI) that total \$729, the season's savings of approximately \$315 allow her to stay warm in the winter and buy the asthma medicine she needs. Before, the building was "frozen" due to both the lack of oil and a damaged heating system, a problem that Celia says still persists.

Chavez's program is coordinated by Citizens Energy Corporation, a Boston-based non-profit that has provided heating oil to low-income people in the Northeast

## Who's eligible?

Households making less than 60 percent of the state median income, or \$43,000 for a family of four. Homeowners and housing cooperatives are eligible. However, the entire building must sign up.

## Want to sign up?

Call 1.877.JOE.4.OIL

since 1979. The program was founded by former Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy II, son of Robert F. Kennedy, and claims no political affiliations or motives. According to Ashley Durmer, spokeswoman for the organization, "We're just trying to get oil to people who need it."

In addition to New York City, the program reaches out to needy households in 16 states. Chavez has allotted 100 million gallons of oil for the heating season, from Nov. 15, 2006 to Mar. 14, 2007.

Although the American venture has come under heavy fire by conservatives as a personal publicity stunt by Chavez, who has repeatedly denounced the Bush administration, it is in line with many of Chavez's domestic initiatives such as discounted food, health clinics and free education through college for Venezuelan citizens.

"From what I understand, they don't use that oil in Venezuela," says Celia in her comfortably warm living room, "So they give it to people who need it. It was very nice of them to help the people of the U.S."

## THE PEOPLE'S LAWYER

a project of the  
National Lawyers Guild NYC

# Cops Face the Grand Jury

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

What should we expect as the Sean Bell case goes to the grand jury? Will it be like the Amadou Diallo case, in which the grand jury found reason to press criminal charges, although the officers were ultimately acquitted?

The right to a grand jury is contained in the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; the function is to provide a community filter on a prosecutor's discretion. It is designed to protect a suspect from having to face serious criminal charges on flimsy evidence. In New York, grand juries are composed of 23 people and 12 of them must vote for an indictment or else the case cannot be prosecuted as a felony.



PHOTO: GOTHAMIST.COM

In order to preserve the presumption of innocence, the proceedings of a grand jury always stay secret – much to the consternation of the media.

A suspect has the right to testify before the grand jury but may decide not to do so, preserving the right to remain silent throughout the duration of the criminal proceedings. Officer Michael Oliver, who fired 31 shots, has said he will testify before the grand jury, but he wants to be the last, following an expected 40 to 50 witnesses. Perhaps he is hoping that some of that secret testimony will leak out to his advantage.

When he testifies, he is not allowed to have a lawyer with him. He may step out of the grand jury room to confer with his attorney, but the attorney may not enter the grand jury room.

The surviving victims of the Kahlua Cabaret shootout will speak to the grand jury. They say the officers did not reveal their plainclothes status, and they thought they were being robbed. Unless the other officers convince the grand jury that they thought their lives were in danger, there will have to be an indictment.

The four other cops have said they will testify. No announcement has been made as to whether any of them will receive immunity from prosecution in exchange for their testimony. They may stick together like Abner Louima's abusers did, apparently to concoct a story that would keep all but one of them out of jail, as well as provide grounds for an appeal.

Even if there are no criminal charges, there will certainly be a civil lawsuit for deprivation of civil rights. Most likely, the taxpayers will pay the cost of the defense and the damages. One effective reform would be to take the damages award out of the NYPD budget. Presently it comes from general coffers. With an ineffective Civilian Complaint Review Board and a politically powerful police union, there is very little deterrent to shooting first and asking questions later.

*The People's Lawyer is a project of the National Lawyers Guild, New York City Chapter, 212-679-6018, [www.nlgny.org](http://www.nlgny.org).*

# RNC Data Freed

BY CHRIS ANDERSON

Following a sweeping judicial ruling on Jan. 22, activists and journalists may soon have access to additional information on the circumstances surrounding the arrest of more than 1,800 people during protests against the Republican National Convention (RNC) in the summer of 2004.

Responding to litigation filed by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) and the *New York Times*, a federal judge rejected New York City's efforts to block voluminous RNC-related materials – including police videotapes, Pier 57 environmental and "police exposure" reports and NYPD pre-convention training manuals – from public view.

"The public has an important interest in knowing what was behind the NYPD's mass arrest and detention of protesters during the convention," said NYCLU Associate Legal Director Christopher Dunn after the ruling.

Among the evidence to be released, and of particular concern to many RNC arrestees, will be three environmental reports documenting potential health hazards at "Pier 57," an empty building on Manhattan's far West Side used to hold hundreds of those arrested at convention protests. A series of articles in 2005 by Drew Poe, first published on NYC Indymedia, reported that the City had information as early as May 2004 that Pier 57 contained "asbestos, lead and multiple fire hazards."

Additional evidence ordered released includes videotapes of mass arrests at Church St. and Fulton St. in lower Manhattan and at Union Square East on Aug. 31, as well as internal NYPD charts documenting the time between arrest and arraignment for hundreds of protesters.

An earlier, limited release of convention-related materials documented the political considerations involved in the City's selective granting or denial of dozens of RNC related protest permits.

The NYCLU has delayed the latest document release while the City decides whether to appeal the judge's ruling.

## STILL MARCHING FOR JUSTICE



**SEAN BELL:** Protesters (top) rally outside the U.N. on Jan. 29 to denounce NYPD human rights violations and call for the resignation of Police Commissioner Ray Kelly. (Bottom) Omawale Clay of the December 12th Movement speaks. *PHOTO: DENNIS W. HO*



# Take it to the Bank

IRATE TENANT GROUPS FORCE BIG LENDERS TO TURN ON SLEAZY SLUMLORDS.  
“WE STAYED WHERE WE WERE AND FOUGHT,” SAYS ONE RESIDENT.

BY CHLOE TRIBICH

For residents of 443 Cyrus Place in the Bronx, securing repairs for the ever-present leaks, mold and broken mailboxes in their 16-unit building was always a fight. But in September 2005, a fire forced the relocation of the majority of the tenants and left the rest to live in charred apartments without security or heat.

Infuriated by the deteriorated conditions, the remaining tenants organized with the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) and Housing Here and Now (HHN), ultimately negotiating with the mortgage lender, Citibank, to secure repairs.

“We had a meeting with the tenant association, Citibank officials and the landlord in my living room,” said tenant leader Ramona Santana. “And it was only then, after we got the landlord and the bank involved, that the situation improved.”

## THE GOOD REPAIR CLAUSE

As individual landlords and the City of New York prove unable or unwilling to respond effectively to tenant concerns, banks, which often underwrite loans to landlords of properties in disrepair, are positioned as attractive tenant organizing targets.

The “good repair clause” — a common mortgage clause that requires the borrower to maintain the building well — can be used as leverage to engage lenders in forcing repairs.

“Mortgage lenders have to be held accountable for building conditions — until the loan is paid off, the building is their collateral. It’s common sense for them to care about the conditions,” said

James Staton, an activist with the NYC AIDS Housing Network.

Most mortgages outline obligations of the borrower and the lender and punitive actions that the lender can take if the borrower defaults on obligations. These obligations commonly include timely debt payment, adequate maintenance and registration of rents. Lenders often reserve the right to inspect the property without notification, raise the interest rates, perform repairs without the borrower’s knowledge or consent and foreclose.

If they are making their expected profit, banks are hesitant to take action, however, and courts — the institutions that facilitate the foreclosure process — are not sympathetic to efforts to foreclose based on maintenance.

## LAUNCHING A CAMPAIGN

HHN’s Fix It Now campaign was launched in July 2005. One goal was to ensure that banks make building conditions a key consideration in all stages of their multifamily lending business.

As part of this campaign, residents at 552 Academy Street in the Inwood neighborhood of Manhattan, along with organizers from ACORN and HHN, held vigils and press conferences during the summer of 2005. The actions culminated with a protest in the lobby of the luxury

residence of the then-landlord, Gadi Zamir, in Battery Park City.

In response, Citibank, the building’s mortgage lender, brought the landlord to the table to discuss repairs and began a more extended series of negotiations over their multifamily lending policy. Zamir eventually sold the building. Since summer 2005, significant work has been completed by a new landlord, including the installation of new stoops and structural stabilization.

Hoping to build on the success with Citibank, in January 2006 HHN began a grassroots effort targeting New York

repair needs. “Some banks still act like they just want to meet with us without taking real action, but we will make progress as long as we keep the pressure on.”

## THE NOTORIOUS MOSHE PILLER

2654 Valentine Avenue in the Bronx is owned by the notorious landlord Moshe Piller and mortgaged by NYCB. Piller has been singled out as uniquely problematic by the New York City Department of

the front courtyard, was completed.

“We have come a very long way in the past year and a half and the inspections from NYCB were one of the best strategies against Piller. But still we have a very long way to go,” said Xiomara Mejias, a tenant leader.

Tenants do not yet have full confidence that Piller will undertake the more substantial and expensive rehabilitation work, such as upgrades of the plumbing system or boiler replacement. Getting NYCB to take more drastic and costly action against a borrower who is meeting his debt obligations and making

some repairs will be a challenge.

Since spring 2006, dozens of buildings in the four major boroughs have received inspections from mortgage lenders at the request of HHN groups, resulting in many repairs. But whether the increase in repair activity continues or simply constitutes a token effort intended to demobilize angry and exhausted renters depends on the extent to which tenants stay united and ready to mobilize.

For tenants at 552 Academy Street in Inwood, there has been slow progress on repairs, and residents will likely soon be confronted with Major Capital Improvement (MCI) rent increases.

The Cyrus Place tenants have been successful in securing substantial work, but have faced their own share of unanticipated obstacles. In the fall of 2006, as the extent of the necessary rehabilitation work became clear, the landlord indicated his intention to seek Major Capital Improvement (MCI) rent increases, relocate tenants to other apartments in the building, and reissue their leases.

When tenants refused, the landlord brought his frustrations to housing court. The landlord submitted papers insisting that the tenants be added as respondents in the litigation HPD had brought against him for housing code violations.

The landlord argued that HPD should name the tenants as a guilty party — along with the landlord himself — in a case in which the crime was lack of repairs. Luckily, tenants were able to exploit the antagonism between the City and the landlord to win commitments from both parties to keep their current leases and refrain from seeking MCI rent increases.

“No matter how much the landlord pressured us, we refused to leave and we refused to sign new leases,” commented Ramona Santana, the tenant leader in the building. “We stayed where we were and we fought. This is why we were successful.”

Chloe Tribich is an organizer with Housing Here and Now. To



ART BY LEO GARCIA

Community Bank (NYCB), the biggest multifamily lender in the city, with hundreds of distressed buildings.

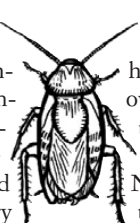
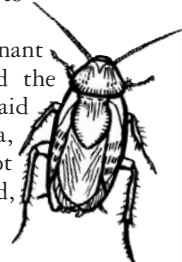
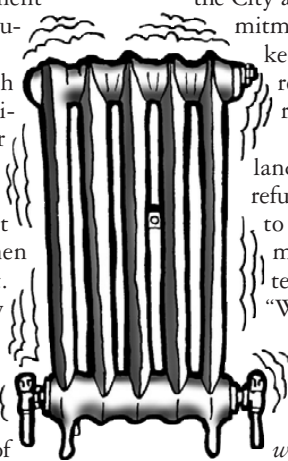
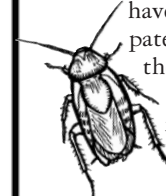
The campaign included tours of NYCB-mortgaged buildings with politicians, protests at the home and office of the CEO, Joseph Ficalora, and ultimately face-to-face negotiations that resulted in a written commitment from NYCB to improve conditions in its mortgaged properties. Since then, HHN has secured similar agreements from several other lenders.

“When we went to Ficalora’s house we brought tenants from all over the city together and really held the bank accountable,” said Shirlene Cooper, the lead organizer of the NYC AIDS Housing Network and tenant in a building with many

Housing Preservation and Development through housing court litigation and the Targeted Cyclical Enforcement Program, which identifies particularly distressed buildings.

Despite protests at his Borough Park home, tenant-landlord negotiations and press conferences, Piller refused to make significant repairs.

With organizing support from NWBCCC, tenants then secured NYCB’s full engagement. The bank performed monthly door-to-door property inspections and corresponded regularly with Piller regarding repair work. It was only then that more significant work, such as repavement of







BY MYRA HELLERSTEIN AND  
AMANDA THIEROFF

“I heard about Gardasil because my friend was in the ‘one less’ commercial, she told me about it,” said 16-year-old Lillian Oquendo from Brooklyn. Lillian has recently undergone the first dose of Merck’s new vaccine, Gardasil, which prevents the four strains of HPV (Human Papillomavirus) that most commonly cause genital warts and cervical cancer in women. “I figured, why not?” she said, “I’m not really stressed about risks. If it will help protect me, it’s probably safe. My mom was cool with it.”

Teenage girls get their sex education from diverse sources. Often, in New York City, the information does not come from their schools, where health classes are either absent or focus only on pregnancy prevention and select STDs like gonorrhea, chlamydia and HIV/AIDS. Much of the current buzz about HPV has come from television ads featuring girls who want to be “one less” – one less death due to cervical cancer. While many girls have seen the ad, which features energetic girls jumping rope while chanting “o-n-e-l-e-s-s, I’m gonna be one less,” some girls are still confused about the details of the virus and of the vaccine.

Jaene Knight is an 11th grader at Urban Assembly Media high school in Manhattan. She claims that the only sex education that she has received was a single day of workshops at the beginning of her junior year. Students were taught the dangers of HIV/AIDS and the importance of condom use, but did not learn about HPV, despite the fact that 50-75 percent of American men and women will become infected in their lifetime.

Jaene’s classmate, 16-year-old Megan Fernandez, also claimed that she had not heard about HPV until she saw the TV ads. “I know it has something to do with cervical cancer,” she said, “but I want to know more about how you get it.”

Although there is no standardized health curriculum that includes education about

# HPV AND YOU

GIRLS LEARN ABOUT HPV FROM COMMERCIALS, NOT THE CLASSROOM.

HPV, many New York City schools do teach their kids about the risks that they face. Beth Israel Medical Center partners with Washington Irving High School to offer a school-based clinic providing mentoring and peer education to students.

Washington Irving High School Senior Simone Leslie, after learning about HPV in a jeopardy game in her health class, worked with other students to petition the city to get the vaccine offered at her school’s free clinic. She has already received the first dose of the vaccine. “I would encourage any female who is a teenager to go out and get this shot,” she said. “It doesn’t hurt to go that extra mile and get that shot done.”

## A GREEN LIGHT FOR IRRESPONSIBLE SEX?

Dr. Ed Lewis, a pediatrician in Rochester, New York, has experienced a torrent of interest in the HPV vaccine from adolescent girls and their mothers. He has presently given out several hundred doses, some girls already on their second dose, which is offered two months after the first dose has been administered.

“The most common misconception I’ve heard is that people don’t need [the vaccine] if they’re not sexually active or have been exposed to or infected with HPV. But they should still get it to protect themselves,” Dr. Lewis said.

The vaccine protects girls and women against four major strains of HPV; however, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there are about 40 strains of the virus. Several healthcare providers have suggested that this number is actually even higher, closer to 90 or 100 different strains. The vaccine protects against the two strains that cause about 70 percent of cases of cervical cancer and the two strains that cause about 90 percent of cases of genital warts.

“Even if a girl has been infected with HPV, she should still get the vaccine to prevent against the type of HPV that causes cervical cancer,” Dr. Lewis said.

“My mom would probably not want me to get it because she’d think it would promote sex or something,” said 17-year-old Che’te Bey from Long Island City, Queens.

Christian groups like Focus on the Family have opposed mandatory administration of the vaccine fearing it will promote promiscuous behavior and girls will feel better protected when they have sex early or have sex with multiple partners.

“I wish that I had been vaccinated,” said Sara Edmunds, a woman who currently has a strain of HPV that leads to cervical cancer. “I wish that we all had. I wish that the FDA hadn’t sat on the vaccine for a while before

approving it, and I wish that all 11 and 12 year old girls can get vaccinated now.”

“Is the vaccine a green light to go have irresponsible sex? No. It is to protect girls from potentially contracting a serious disease,” said Dr. Gale Blakley, an ObGyn, at the Helen B. Atkinson Center in Harlem and the Associate Medical Director for Women’s Services at the Community Healthcare Network in New York City. She also warns that just because someone has been vaccinated, they should not forget about the dangers of cervical cancer altogether.

While the vaccine is effective in preventing the two main strains of HPV that lead to cervical cancer, there are still 12 or more other strains that can result in the disease. Dr. Blakley estimates that close to 99 percent of all cases of cervical cancer are caused by some kind of HPV infection. She urges patients to get vaccinated, but to also get pap smears on a regular basis (1-2 times per year). Pap smears can detect cervical cancer in its early stages and consequently save lives. “Now with this vaccine coming on board, the vaccine along with the Pap smear, we’re going to see even fewer cases of cervical cancer in the near future,” Dr. Blakley said.

## WHO IS COVERED AND WHO IS NOT?

Gardasil is the most expensive preventative vaccine on the market. At \$120 per shot – \$360 for the three-shot regimen – questions arise as to who can afford the vaccination and who cannot.

“A lot of physicians are concerned about the costs of the vaccine. Insurance companies might not cover the full cost of [Gardasil],” said pediatrician Dr. Ann Hellerstein.

The Federal Vaccines for Children program (VCF) will provide the vaccination free to females under the age of 19 who are either uninsured, on Medicaid, or who are either American Indian or Alaskan Natives. Doctors and the FDA are recommending that Gardasil be administered largely to 11 year olds, as they are also getting vaccinated that year for Tetanus/Diphtheria among other immunizations.

While the recommended age for administration is 11-12, Gardasil has been approved up until the age of 26. Unfortunately for the 3 out of 10 women age 19-26 who are uninsured, trying to protect oneself against cervical cancer could mean some hefty out-of-pocket expenses.

Many, but not all, public and private insurance companies plan to cover the HPV vaccine, and policies about who will be covered and to what extent has yet to be determined. Presently, Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield has confirmed that they will cover the

## The Facts on HPV and Cervical Cancer

HPV is a sexually transmitted disease that causes up to 70 percent of cervical cancer cases in women. The vaccine is effective in preventing the two main strains of HPV that lead to cervical cancer. However, a dozen or more other strains exist that can result in the disease.

Condoms significantly reduce many HPV transmissions, but cannot protect against open sores located in areas not covered by a condom. It is possible to contract HPV without engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse.

Clinical tests have shown that the HPV vaccine will only provide protection for four years. It is administered in a three-shot regimen, spread out over a time period of five to seven months.

The HPV vaccine introduces particles of the dead virus into the bloodstream, and the human body develops antibodies to these particles. Women never run the risk of accidentally contracting the virus through the vaccine to because the virus is never alive in their system.

Women should get Pap smears, which can detect pre-cancerous cells, one to two times per year. The American Cancer Society and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology suggest that women begin having Pap smears three years after their first sexual contact and no later than the age of 21.

costs of the Gardasil vaccine for teenagers. Additionally, Merck offers a little-known patient assistance program for women aged 19-26 who are uninsured or underinsured. The program requires an application process and forms demonstrating income. To qualify, women must be low income (below 200 percent of the poverty line), be uninsured and see a private physician who already distributes other Merck products.

Currently in New York City, Planned Parenthood and New York State Department of Health-run clinics do not offer the vaccine for free or reduced prices yet; however, both organizations expect to offer the vaccine in 2007.

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# nat'l briefs

## TWO CONVICTED IN OHIO FOR 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION FRAUD

Two Ohio election officials were convicted Jan. 24 of rigging the recount of the 2004 presidential election. Cuyahoga County election coordinator Jacqueline Maiden and assistant manager Kathleen Dreamer face up to 18 months in prison. The election workers were found guilty of pre-selecting the ballots for the Dec. 16, 2004 recount so that the hand count of three percent of the ballots would match the electronic results, as a way to avoid a lengthy and expensive hand recount of all votes in the county. The prosecution did not allege that the misconduct affected the election's outcome. According to the 2004 recount in the heavily Democratic county where approximately 600,000 ballots were cast, John Kerry gained only 17 votes, while George Bush lost six.

## NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC HOUSING OCCUPATION ENDED

A 17-day occupation of a fenced-off public housing development in St. Bernard Parish was ended Jan. 31 after two activists were arrested during the night at gun point by the New Orleans Police Department SWAT team. Since Jan. 15, the activists had been cleaning and renovating the buildings, which they hope to save from proposed demolition. Federal and local housing agencies have plans to raze the 5,000-unit public housing apartment development, home to nearly 49,000 displaced New Orleans residents, rather than repair them from the hurricane damage.

## BLACK PANTHERS ARRESTED FOR 1971 COP KILLING

Eight former Black Panthers, including Francisco Torres of Queens, New York, were arrested on Jan. 23 on charges related to the 1971 killing of San Francisco police officer Sgt. John V. Young. Lawyers for the accused men, who argue that the three-decade old prosecution is as much about political retaliation as it is about justice, note that many of the original charges were thrown out of court in 1974 following revelations that torture was used to extract confessions. The case, contends Center for Constitutional Rights Legal Director Bill Goodman, "Serves to remind us that the U.S. government has a history of torture and abuse in this country, particularly against African-Americans."

## SEATTLE WTO PROTESTERS GET JUSTICE

On Jan. 30, a federal jury ruled that the arrest of about 170 World Trade Organization (WTO) protesters in Seattle in 1999 violated due-process rights based on the assertion that police had failed to gather any individualized evidence of wrongdoing. The class-action lawsuit now enters the penalty phase where a settlement will be negotiated. More than 50,000 people converged in Seattle seven years ago to protest the first WTO conference in the U.S., resulting in a violent police response and mass arrests.

## 16 CONVICTED FOR SOA PROTEST

On Jan. 29, a Georgia judge found 16 individuals guilty of trespassing after peacefully walking onto the Fort Benning military base Nov. 19 to protest the School of the Americas/Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/WHINSEC). More than 20,000 peaceful demonstrators converged at the base on the weekend of Nov. 17-19, 2006 for the annual event. The demonstrators face sentences ranging from one year probation to six months in federal prison. The base is home to the combat training school for Latin American soldiers and made headlines in 1996 when the Pentagon released training manuals used at the school that advocated torture, extortion and execution. SOA Watch blames the military school for human rights abuses and atrocities across Latin America.

# Same Clinton, Different Gender

## HILLARY CLINTON LAUNCHES CORPORATE-BACKED BID FOR WHITE HOUSE

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Hillary Clinton is neither a lesbian witch nor a feminist heroine.

Like her husband, she's an ambitious yuppie corporate lawyer.

Whatever principles she has probably stem from that. And whatever principles she has are far overshadowed by her market positioning, in which she constantly calculates stances that pay lip service to the desires of Democratic voters, please the party's financial backers, and occasionally pander to Republicans.

Her entry into the presidential race does not bode well for the idea that 2008 might be the year in which a strong grassroots movement could swing the Democratic party to advocate getting out of Iraq, rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, developing serious alternative-energy and national health programs, and reversing the Reaganomic-corporate assault on working people. Specifically, her decision to forego public financing for her campaign and rely entirely on massive private donations is likely to accelerate the trends that have made it difficult for grassroots movements – or even primary voters – to influence who the nominee is.

In the 1960s, the expansion of the primaries and the decline of political

machines democratized the presidential nominating process. In 1960, John F. Kennedy got the Democratic nod by proving that a Boston Catholic could win in Wisconsin and West Virginia; in 1968, antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy's near-victory in the New Hampshire primary convinced Lyndon Johnson not to seek re-election. The conservative grassroots movement won the climactic California primary and the Republican nomination for Barry Goldwater in 1964, and the antiwar movement did the same for Democrat George McGovern in 1972.

In the last 20 years, however, the skyrocketing costs of campaigning and the "front-loading" of the nomination process have meant that the race has often been effectively over by the middle of March. And when the campaign begins more than a year before the first primary, power shifts from voters and activists to financiers and the "Washington consensus," the nexus of money, media and power that anoints the front-runners, separating the "serious" from the "fringe" candidates based on who's amassed the most funds and who possesses the intangibles of establishmentarian credibility. In 2004, Howard Dean, the Democrat who attracted most of the antiwar movement's electoral energy, was doomed before a single actual vote was cast. The Beltway world deemed him demented after the repeated airings of his terminally unfunky attempt to rouse a crowd of supporters dejected by his loss in the Iowa caucuses.

What this means is that in a country where a majority of voters would probably endorse getting out of Iraq and spending the money in New Orleans, we'll likely spend the next 22 months hearing a lot of tough-sounding mush about "phased redeployment" – and nothing about stopping the planned demolition of New Orleans' housing projects.

Love Hillary or hate her? The most commonly heard opinions about her come more from the psychological projections of celebrity image politics than from reality. Lots of left-liberal women waltzed around in 1992 sporting "Elect Hillary's Husband" buttons simply because after 12 years of Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush, here was a candidate's wife with a career and opinions of her own. For the same reason, the far right has painted her as a satanic harpy, sitting with Janet Reno by the lesbian coven's bonfire roasting fetuses like marshmallows.

If there is anything satanic about Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, it's Rupert Murdoch's not-so-tacit support; he held a fundraiser for her last year, and the *New York Post* has become surprisingly kind to her. Criticizing Hillary for this is considered left-liberal purist paranoia, but there's a reason for it. Measured by the global wattage of his intentions and power, Murdoch is the most evil figure in the media world, with his metastasizing-tumor greed and willingness to turn any outlet he owns into a spewer of far-right propaganda. Witness Fox News' broadcasting of the dubious allegation that Barack Obama had attended an Islamic-fanatic madrassa in Indonesia as a child. When a CNN reporter went to Indonesia and found that it actually was a public elementary school, a Fox pundit wondered if he'd seen the kids "in any terrorist training camps." (Any knowledge of recent Muslim history would reveal that there wasn't much of a jihadist movement when Obama was in second grade.)

Murdoch is probably betting that 2008 will be a Democratic year, so he wants a candidate he can work with. If he can't get a Margaret Thatcher, he'll take a Tony Blair; Murdoch's *Sun*, his British flagship paper, endorsed Blair for prime minister in the 1997, 2001 and 2005 elections. Blair, as Bill Clinton did with Ronald Reagan, left Thatcher's domestic depredations largely intact, ameliorating a few and intensifying others. And John Lydon has provided the best description to date of Blair's role in Iraq: "Bush's poodle."



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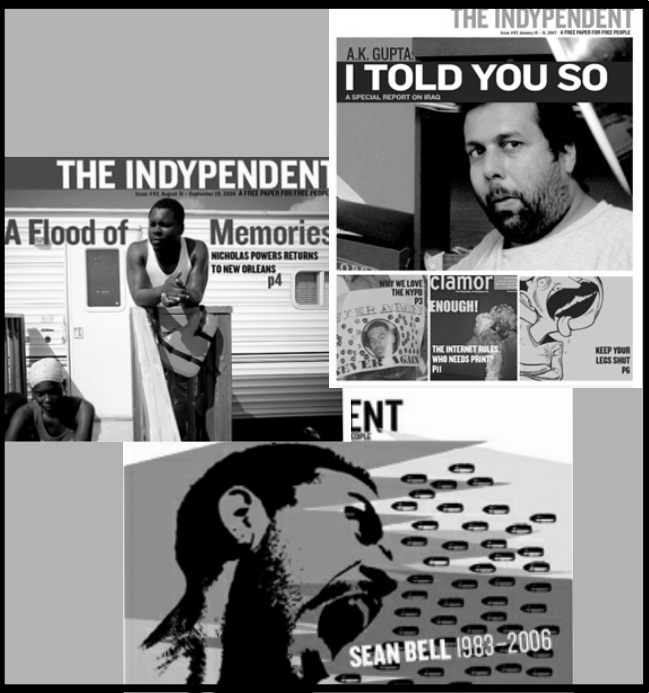
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NICHOLAS ALLANACH

# Involuntary Conscription Not So Bitchin'

BY RICK JAHNKOW

Ever since House Democrat Charles Rangel introduced his first proposal to bring back the military draft in 2003, it's been amazing to see how much amnesia there is on the subject, especially among some of those who consider themselves liberals or "progressives."

Supporters of Rangel's bill (which includes a mandatory civilian service option) make what seems on the surface to be a compelling case. They say one reason our government is so willing to launch aggressive military action is that the children of political leaders and the wealthy elite do not face much risk from combat. They point out that this is because the armed forces are maintained by a system of recruitment that unfairly targets working-class and middle-income people. They also argue that a stronger service ethic is needed, along with more civilian options for performing tasks that would benefit society. The points are valid, and so it seems reasonable when some people conclude that a system of conscription is needed to address such issues.

But the problem with this thinking is that it is far too simplistic and only focuses on limited parts of the picture. It ignores important historical facts and fails to consider an entirely different set of social and political consequences that are inherent in any system of involuntary service.

## MAKING WAR POSSIBLE

One of the forgotten historical facts is that whenever a draft has been employed in the U.S. (which has been infrequently), it has been used to make waging war possible, not as a device to keep our government from entering a conflict. A good example is our most recent experience with conscription during the Vietnam War. The draft that was already in place as the war developed made it easier for presidents Johnson and Nixon to merely open the tap and pour out more bodies to fuel the conflict. As a result, the Vietnam war lasted almost 10 years, took the lives of millions of people and caused massive destruction in Southeast Asia. All of this happened despite the strong antiwar and draft resistance movements that spread across the country.

Draft supporters say that, in the past, the rules of the Selective Service System favored privileged youths and therefore didn't trigger the kind of opposition from the elite that would have stopped the Vietnam War sooner. But there is no evidence that drafting a few more affluent kids would have made a difference, since initial support for the war was high and was driven by a general Cold War fever that affected almost the entire population.

The claim that a draft could be made fairer today isn't realistic anyway. There will always have to be medical deferments,

which are easier to get when you have the money to pay for braces or private medical exams and documentation that are the key to getting disqualified at an Army induction physical. And those with a better education — which is linked to one's socio-economic status — will have a distinct advantage when it comes to successfully wading through the process to secure conscientious objector status.

I know how these factors work because as a community college draft counselor during the Vietnam War, I struggled to help low-income students whose limited resources made it harder to gain recognition of legitimate claims for medical deferments and conscientious objector status. It won't be any different under Rangel's proposed draft. Furthermore, affluent individuals who do wind up in the military would still have the advantages of their education and political connections to help avoid combat.

Whenever we go to war, whether our military is drafted or recruited, socioeconomic status is always a factor in determining who is at greatest risk. And in a system with a civilian service component like Rangel is proposing, advantages in education, personal wealth and political influence will still be a factor in avoiding the battlefield.

## MILITARIZING CIVILIANS

Another part of the picture ignored by supporters of Rangel's legislation — one that is especially ironic for those draft advocates

who say they are "peace activists" — is the increased militarization that comes with conscription. Because draftees are in the military for only two-year terms instead of four or six, there is a much higher turnover of personnel, and this means that a much larger portion of society is required to go through military training. One of the main functions of this training, especially at boot camp, is to strip the civilian identity from every trainee, instill in him or her the values of military culture, and perform the conditioning needed to produce an obedient soldier who is acclimated to the use of violence.

What many people ignore is that there is no comparable effort made to reverse this process when draftees leave the military. So even though the conditioning doesn't stick in everyone, the net effect over time is to further militarize civilian society, not civilianize the military (which some people have argued). Indeed, this militarization function is one reason why conscription has been so favored by authoritarian states. Examples include Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, Prussia and dictators like Napoleon, Stalin and Franco, just to name a few. In today's context of a U.S. government that wages preemptive war, threatens countries that have done nothing to harm us and assumes police powers that the Constitution disallows, a system that would further militarize the U.S. is the last thing that anyone should support.

Imagine, for a moment, what would have happened if conscription had been in place

at the time of 9/11. In that period of emotional nationalism, Bush could have easily gotten away with boosting draft calls and deploying a much larger force to the Middle East. Following the neocon agenda for the region, then, we could have already extended the fighting to Syria and Iran by now, and then moved on to a confrontation with North Korea.

## HOLDING OUR CHILDREN HOSTAGE

This leads me to point out a major contradiction in Rangel's rationale for a draft. He and others are arguing that it would help slow down the rush to war (a claim unsupported by any historical facts), while at the same time arguing that we need a draft because our military is exhausted and more troops are required for the mission they've been given. So which is it? Is a draft going to help prevent or end a war, or help wage it? And if it's the latter, then isn't opening up the tap for more troops the last thing that war opponents should want to do? If we really are against military aggression, isn't it better that we stick to demanding that the current mission be cancelled and, simultaneously, do everything we can to cut off the flow of personnel for war?

If you believe the other part of Rangel's argument, he essentially wants to force a change in foreign policy by holding people's children hostage — which includes the children of people who have been struggling and sacrificing to end the Iraq war. Isn't hostage-taking something we generally condemn in our society, and shouldn't we have serious reservations about supporting such a tactic?

The reality is that popular opposition to bringing back the draft is still overwhelming, and legislators know that it would be political suicide to attempt such a thing at the moment. So why go to the trouble of rebutting pro-draft arguments from liberals or anyone else? The answer is that such efforts to promote conscription can, over time, acclimate enough people to the idea of a draft that at a point in the future, in the context of some national emergency pretext, the politicians may then attempt what they now are afraid to do.

People who are now advocating a draft need to be challenged to look more carefully at the facts and consider the full, global implications of what they are proposing. Otherwise, they may eventually get what they are asking for, which would come back to haunt us all.

*Rick Jahnkow works for two San Diego-based antimilitarist organizations, the Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities, (www.projectyano.org) and Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft (www.comdsd.org). This article originally appeared on zmag.org*

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE DRAFT

Memories of the social unrest the draft caused during the Vietnam Era still haunt the U.S. political establishment. However, forced military conscription has a checkered past that long predates the advent of flower power:

**1863:** The bloodiest riots in U.S. history break out in New York City when Congress institutes a draft at the height of the Civil War. Under the law, young men of means could obtain a substitute or pay a \$300 commutation fee. Of the 776,000 men drafted by the Union, 74,000 furnished substitutes and another 87,000 paid the commutation fee.

**1917-1919:** The government puts in place a full-scale draft upon entering World War I. Some 300,000 men failed to respond to their draft notice altogether, and as many as 170,000 more deserted within weeks of reporting.

**1940:** Congress imposes the first-ever peacetime draft that continues through World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

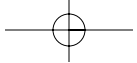
**1964-1973:** Escalation of the U.S. war in Vietnam leads to call-up of hundreds of thousands of young men to fight in an unpopular conflict. The draftees are overwhelmingly poor and working-class as those with more education and connections (including dozens of future conservative leaders) obtain academic or medical deferments or gain appointments in cushy National Guard units that would not be deployed overseas.

**1970:** A 15-member presidential commission that includes free-market guru Milton Friedman calls for abolishing the draft and switching to an all-volunteer army.

**1973:** The draft is abolished. Sources: *civilweek.com*, *U.S. Army War College*, *wikipedia.org*, *rand.org*.

—JOHN TARLETON





ANTIWAR

# Escalating the Antiwar Movement

AFTER 4 YEARS OF MARCHING, IRAQ WAR OPPONENTS LOOK TO RAMP UP RESISTANCE

A new Democratic congressional majority, growing public opposition to the war and George W. Bush's call to "surge" 21,000 more troops to Iraq has brought the antiwar movement to a critical juncture. Will large marches, like the Jan. 27 march in Washington, D.C., and congressional lobbying stop the war? *The Independent* spoke with various activists within the movement – including students, advocates of direct action, military resisters, community organizers and engaged Buddhists, – in search of new directions for ending the war.

INTERVIEWS BY JESSICA LEE

### LESLIE KAUFFMAN United For Peace And Justice (UFPJ)

"It's hard from the vantage point of 2007 to remember how little political space there was for dissent before the Iraq war," said Leslie Kauffman, Mobilizing Coordinator for United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) – a coalition of more than 1,300 local and national organizations.

UFPJ is the mainstream face of the antiwar movement; since its creation in Dec. 2002, it has successfully organized several of the largest marches against the Iraq War, bringing together a coalition of 1400 groups to oppose the Bush administrations' policy of permanent warfare.

"To do what UFPJ did in the early days, such as the organization of the massive Feb. 15, 2003 demonstration, wasn't just an important move to try to prevent

the U.S. invasion of Iraq, but it was also a bold opening up of political space in this country. It opened the space for what we see now, a supermajority of people speaking out against the war."

However, from its hierarchical organizing structure to its unique focus on mass mobilizations and, most recently, its decision to focus efforts to lobbying congress, UFPJ has been held responsible by many in the left for the failure of the antiwar movement to actually end the Iraq War.

"Criticizing UFPJ is not a constructive way to move the antiwar movement forward," said Kauffman, whose activist history is deeply rooted in the direct action tradition. "The direct action movement for the most part has been invisible since the Iraq war began. The people from the direct action background should be doing the organizing, rather than criticizing UFPJ for what it is doing. We have emphasized creating an organization that can offer the broadest group of people a space to support opposition to the war... for ordinary people who won't put themselves in the line of fire of tear gas or sit for four hour meetings."

### DREW HENDRICKS AND PHAN NGUYEN Port Militarization Resistance (Olympia WA)

In Olympia, Wash., a small antiwar community is directly confronting the U.S. military. "We are organizing against the militarization of Port Olympia, which might not seem like a big deal from an outsider," said Drew Hendricks, Olympia organizer and DJ on Free Radio Olympia.

"Port Olympia is the only option the U.S. military has to ship combat vehicles and larger units from Fort Lewis, Wash. If we can stop them from using that port, then one of the largest military bases in the country cannot support the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan," Hendricks said.

In May 2006, activists with Port Militarization Resistance (PMR), part of the umbrella group Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace (OMJP), briefly began a 10-day protest at Port Olympia blocking a convoy of Stryker combat vehicles from the

3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division of Fort Lewis. Police responded with pepper spray, tasers, and batons against the peaceful demonstrators, ultimately arresting 37 people.

One month later, as the troops were deploying to Iraq for a second tour, U.S. Army 1st Lt. Ehren Watada of the 3rd Stryker Brigade became the first commissioned officer to publicly refuse deployment to Iraq on grounds the war is illegal. Lt. Watada is facing a court martial on Feb. 5. Two journalists and one Olympia activist recently had subpoenas dropped after being ordered to testify at Watada's hearing

Evergreen College student Phan Nguyen, the subpoenaed activist who is also facing charges for the May actions, notes that antiwar direct action has been successful as a result of the small, dedicated community in Olympia.

"When people see people they know involved in a public act of civil disobedience, they can better relate to it. The key to empowering is letting people see that they can do this too," Hendricks adds that the success of PMR is also due to the presence of independent media outlets in Olympia.

### MATT MCLAUGHLIN Students For a Democratic Society (SDS)

"Some, like those in charge of UFPJ, see the antiwar movement as a pool of support for the Democratic Party, yet the Democrats have just as much at stake for maintaining U.S. control over Middle East oil," said Matt McLaughlin, a freshman at Capital Community College in Hartford, Conn. "Others, like ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) and World Can't Wait, see the antiwar movement as one of

many recruiting grounds for building their own vanguard parties."

McLaughlin is one of the founders of the newly-revived Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the radical student movement that helped found the New Left in the 1960s. The revival of SDS is proof that while it hasn't yet stopped the war, the antiwar movement has been successful in inciting a new era of student-led activism.

"The initiative largely came from youth who were in their first or second year of activism and they were struck by the [antiwar] movement's inadequacies in terms of long term militant strategy as well as democratic process," explained McLaughlin.

With 245 registered SDS chapters in the country, the philosophical roots of new SDS stem from the autonomist/anti-authoritarian/anarchist tradition than the socialist beginnings of the original organization.

"Many of us in SDS are disillusioned with the tactics, strategy and partisanship within the antiwar movement. We've managed to make youth and students more prominent at demonstrations by putting pressure on the movement hierarchy. There simply doesn't seem to be much interest in talking strategy, at least among those in positions of power in the large coalitions. Action has become ritualized. And frankly, without a major shake-up of the status quo in the movement, I can't imagine how the movement could ever become a relevant force in shaping U.S. foreign policy."

McLaughlin emphasized that the antiwar movement needs to provide solidarity with people in Iraq, such as



the Iraq Freedom Caucus (IFC), a coalition of trade and industrial unions, women's groups, student unions, Left parties and others committed to a non-sectarian Iraq and a popular front against the occupation. "If we're serious about 'supporting the resistance,' this is the way to do it," said McLaughlin.

### DAVID SOLNIT People Powered Strategy Project

"Hundreds of thousands of people have been turning out for four years, at some point it is time to escalate," said longtime San Francisco Bay activist and artist David Solnit on the current antiwar movement. "It's not up to UFPJ to do that. If the existing networks aren't doing what needs to be done, then we need to do it ourselves. I am critical of why there isn't national radical organizing. There is no reason why we can't organize widespread direct action with public support."

Solnit points to the antiwar movements' missed opportunities to escalate the level of resistance at critical junctures such as in March 2003, when antiwar activists temporarily shut down downtown San Francisco and targeted war profiteers. "We should have shut down every city in the U.S. at that time and escalated from there."

Two years ago at the Second National Assembly of UFPJ Solnit put forth an antiwar strategy to the voting member groups based on the



continued on page 10

# Confusion on the Left

BY A.K. GUPTA

The Iraq War may be just as unpopular among the American public as the Vietnam War was but there is no mass movement agitating for its end despite thousands of U.S. casualties.

The Vietnam antiwar movement drew strength from the explosion of social movements in the 60s – primarily among Blacks, students and women – there was a sense of moving from victory to victory with the political establishment and wealthy under constant attack.

The draft also played a critical role in antiwar organizing. The GI antiwar movement reached its peak in the early 70s, leading to the breakdown of the military machine and the eventual U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

Today, there is no left. What exists is fragmented, episodic and reactive. The antiwar movement is able to

mobilize large numbers in ritualistic protests, but it is unable to translate those numbers into political leverage to bring an end to the war or sustain day-to-day organizing.

By early 2005, military recruitment was faltering, but few groups have been able to sustain the hard work it takes to be a constant presence outside recruiting stations.

With more than half-a-trillion dollars burned on the Iraq War already, there is an organizing opportunity in tying the defunding of social programs to the obscene military budget. But, with the rise of neoliberalism, the majority of Americans buy into the notion that government should not provide social welfare or monetary assistance (unless it's middle-class entitlements like social security or mortgage deductions).

As for anarchists and the remnants of the global justice movement, they have been largely invisible. Many say

they are refocusing on community organizing instead of national organizing. This is the same mistake the left made in the early 70s when it fragmented into a hundred different movements from labor, environment, back-to-the-land, feminism, identity politics, etc.

Movements gain power by tying community organizing to national and international issues. The explosive growth of the global justice movement at the turn of the millennium strengthened local organizing by joining them in a broader movement against the political and economic forces that shape our lives. Taking on issues of neoliberalism and imperialism – in a way that is connected to people's lives – brings far more people into movements than toiling away on narrow issues.

For the full version of this article, see *independent.org*.



Antiwar militants, seeking to storm Capital Hill, break away from the main march at the Jan. 27 peace mobilization in Washington, D.C. PHOTO: GILLIAN KALSON

## Iraq anti-war timeline

BY IRINA IVANOVA AND CHRIS ANDERSON

### OCTOBER 7, 2002

As many as 20,000 people fill the East Meadow of Central Park in the largest antiwar demonstration, organized by Not in Our Name (NION), on American soil since the buildup to war in Iraq.

### JANUARY 18, 2003

Antiwar demonstrations take place around the world. International ANSWER and NION jointly organize large protests in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco.

### JANUARY 27, 2003

As U.N. Chief Arms Inspector Hans Blix address the U.N. Security Council about the failure to locate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), as 17 people are arrested at a demonstration in the bitter cold outside the U.N.

### FEBRUARY 3, 2003

Five members of the "Pit Stop Ploughshares" enter into Shannon Airport in Ireland and use household hammers to damage a U.S. Navy logistics plane. The five, who could have faced 10 years in prison, were acquitted in 2006.

### FEBRUARY 15, 2003

Millions of people protest the invasion of Iraq in more than 600 cities around the world. The event is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest protest in human history. The global turnout is estimated at 10-15 million.

### MARCH 20, 2003

Explosions are heard in Baghdad at 5:30 a.m. local time. At 10:15 p.m. EST, Bush announces an "invasion of opportunity." The war has begun.

Tens of thousands of school students across the U.K. stage walkouts, and thousands of protesters across the U.S. flood urban centers. Protesters in San Francisco shut down large parts of the city, including the financial district. 1,025 are arrested.

### APRIL 7, 2003

Police preemptively arrest more than 95 people attempting to block entrances to the Carlyle Group in New York City.

### APRIL 9, 2003

U.S. forces take Baghdad. While some Iraqis cheer in the streets, others are rounded up by the American military to help stage the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein.

### MAY 1, 2003

President Bush declares an end to

military operations in Iraq in his "Mission Accomplished" speech from the flight deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln.

### APRIL 28, 2004

Images of torture at Abu Ghraib are revealed on CBS News.

### NOVEMBER 8, 2004

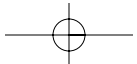
American and Iraqi forces invade Falluja, destroying large swaths of the city, in the bloodiest single battle of the war.

### MARCH 2005

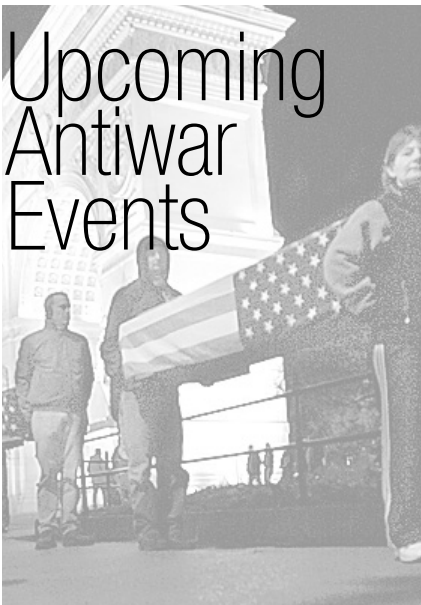
U.S. Army misses its monthly recruiting goal by 27% - the first time in more than five years the U.S. Army fails to meet a monthly target. In June, the U.S. National Guard misses its monthly recruiting target for the ninth month in a row.



PHOTOS: FREDASKEW.COM







**FEBRUARY 2 – 7**  
SUPPORT LT. EHREN WATADA  
Take action against the Iraq war and in support of Lt. Watada during his military court martial for refusing to deploy to Iraq.  
Brooklyn Action: Feb. 3, 4pm.  
*Brooklyn Law School*  
250 Joralemon St.  
[thankyoult.org](http://thankyoult.org), [couragetoresist.org](http://couragetoresist.org)

**BEGINS FEBRUARY 5**  
THE OCCUPATION PROJECT  
A campaign of sustained nonviolent civil disobedience by occupying Congressional offices.  
[vcnv.org/project/the-occupation-project](http://vcnv.org/project/the-occupation-project)

**FEBRUARY 9, 16** 8pm  
SCREENPEACE: AN ANTIWAR FILM FESTIVAL  
*War Resisters League and Brecht Forum:*  
451 West St.  
[warresisters.org](http://warresisters.org)

**FEBRUARY 17** 9am-5pm.  
STUDENTS FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY  
NE REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY 1ST  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
[studentsforademocraticsociety.org](http://studentsforademocraticsociety.org)  
[mds-inc.org](http://mds-inc.org)  
*The New School*

**MARCH 2**  
BARRICADING THE WAR MACHINE  
IN PITTSBURGH  
Barricade the National Robotics Engineering Center, a branch of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) that develops robotic vehicles and weapons delivery systems for the U.S. Army and Marines.  
[organizepittsburgh.org](http://organizepittsburgh.org)

**MARCH 17 – 18**  
4TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE IRAQ WAR  
2007 is the 40th anniversary of the historic 1967 "From Protest to Resistance" antiwar march to the Pentagon during the Vietnam War.  
[answer.pephost.org](http://answer.pephost.org)  
Demonstrations nationwide:  
[unitedforpeace.org](http://unitedforpeace.org)  
March on the Pentagon:

**MARCH 19**  
TAKE IT TO WALL STREET  
Challenging the war profiteers with Wall St. civil disobedience.  
[march19peaceactions.org](http://march19peaceactions.org)

**MARCH – APRIL**  
PORT MILITARIZATION RESISTANCE,  
OLYMPIA, WA.  
Activists are preparing to blockade Port Olympia when military shipments are expected to pass through in March or April.  
[omjp.org](http://omjp.org)

**JUNE 27 – JULY 1**  
U.S. SOCIAL FORUM: ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
Five day conference to challenge war and repression.  
[ussf2007.org](http://ussf2007.org)

# Escalating the Antiwar Movement

*continued from page 9*

## CAITRIONA REED AND MAIA DUERR Engaged Buddhism & Activism

"We understand that social responsibility and spiritual practice is the same thing," explained Caitriona Reed, Dharma instructor at Manzanita Village Retreat Center in Warner Springs, Calif.

"We teach people to take responsibility for their own personal tendencies to react to internal emotional issues in their lives or to the external dynamics of society. When we look at our personal shit, we see that how we respond to foreign policy and the neighbor's dog are all part of the same internal process," Reed said. "We all have choices of how to respond. We have to learn to take responsibility."

However, many who practice meditation are not involved in the antiwar movement. "I often talk to people who are very resistant to the imperial thrust of our culture, but distance themselves from the antiwar movement because of its adversarial nature," noted Reed. "They get turned off by the strident nature of the march."

Maia Duerr, Executive Director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF), said that her job is to make sure there are alternative ways for people to feel involved in the peace movement.

"Our intention is to strongly express some peaceful solution to the war and more humanitarian ways to respond to conflicts," said Duerr, who helped plan the Buddhist Peace Delegation at the Jan. 27 D.C. antiwar march. "We won't be screaming or yelling, but rather trying to embody peace as much as possible during the march."

According to the mission of BPF, the work of an engaged Buddhist is to free all beings from contemporary suffering caused by racism, sexism, militarism, species-ism and class oppression.

Reed noted that many activists visit Manzanita Village because it is a safe place to practice meditation for individuals in queer, mixed race and political communities. "How many social organizations have been destroyed by interpersonal dynamics?" Reed noted. "We have so little time to make social transformation to resist the machinery of this nightmare."



## LAWRENCE HAMM People's Organization for Progress/ Troops Out Now Coalition

"The question becomes, what do you do when you return home after the massive, successful demonstrations in Washington, D.C.?" asked Lawrence Hamm, chairman for People's Organization for Progress

(POP) in Newark, New Jersey.

For the last four years, the public face of the antiwar movement has been largely in the form of a few large demonstrations a year, leaving a disturbing silence in between.

"We need to organize and mobilize at the local level with the same intensity as you do to go to D.C. If everyone went back to their towns and organized and mobilized all over the country, we'd have an antiwar movement," Hamm said.

And Hamm did just that. Last May he came up with the idea to help organize "The People's Peace Conference." "The U.S. War in Iraq & Our Communities," which came together Jan. 20 in Newark. More than 115 local organizations and 500 people – largely people of color – came together for a day to learn how the war on Iraq is impacting their local communities. Hamm noted that one of the most popular workshops was "How do we stop the war in our streets?"

"For many people in urban communities, the violence going on in front of them is just as important as the war in Iraq," Hamm said. "It is essential to make the connection between the two; the decay and despair is because we have to put so much of our national resources abroad in Iraq."

The other goal of the conference was outreach to communities of color to get them involved in the peace movement.

"African-American communities have consistently been opposed to this war from the beginning," Hamm said. "African-Americans have a long history of struggle in America, and that makes us more sensitive to oppression and making war against other people of color."

He wanted the Conference to challenge the low involvement in antiwar movement, which for the African-American community, he believes is due to a failure of national and local Black leadership. "While people might not respond to a call from an antiwar activist, they would respond to a pastor, union or lodge president, or local elected officials." He noted that the success of the recent conference was due to the immediate support from Rev. Dr. M William Howard, Jr. of Bethany Baptist Church in Newark.

## JOSÉ VASQUEZ Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW)

"I don't feel a sense of urgency in the antiwar movement. But within the IVAW, the vets are doing what they are doing because they

carry the deaths and injuries of their friends on their shoulders," said José Vasquez, New York City Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) Chapter President.

IVAW members are uniquely positioned to speak about the situation on the ground in Iraq. Vasquez, staff sergeant and medical/health services instructor in the U.S. Army Reserves, still reports to duty one weekend a month while his application for conscientious objector is pending.

"We are speaking from within the military institution, giving a story people don't see in the mainstream media," Vasquez said. IVAW participated in the Jan. 27 D.C. march, although Vasquez admits he isn't sure how effective it was.

"Given the nature of the war and the audacity of the Bush administration, I feel that people should be stepping it up a bit," said Vasquez.

IVAW members were arrested handing out fliers on depleted uranium in front of the Pentagon Sept. 9, and while protesting Bush's speech to the U.N. on Sept. 19. In the next year, he said that IVAW plans to do more direct actions in front of military bases and offices of corporate war profiteers such as Hummer and KBR.

"We use our credibility to focus on the war on Iraq, however among our membership there is a spectrum of political views, including the contingent who believe one of the things that leads to these types of wars is capitalism itself."

While many in the antiwar movement tout the need to organize the troops, Vasquez cautioned that you have to know how to do it. "We want to hold workshops on how to reach out to the troops, to understand military culture, such as what it feels like preparing to deploy. People in military can be intimidating, but we are all people like you, just in uniform. Also, don't assume that all troops are pro-war."

**INDYPENDENT.ORG EXCLUSIVE:**  
*More interviews with antiwar activists. Go to the web to read about Medea Benjamin (Code Pink, Global Exchange), Ruth Benn (National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee) and Steve Theberge (War Resisters League).*

## Finding a Visionary Narrative

HOW THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT CAN GROUND ITSELF FOR THE LONG HAUL

BY JOHN TARLETON

When the moment of reckoning about Iraq does come it will offer a painful but potentially liberating process of collective self-examination as people ask what went wrong. The easy answer will be to blame Bush, Rumsfeld, poor planning and execution or the demonstrators who "emboldened the enemy" with their protests. It will be up to the antiwar movement to pose more difficult questions about the impact of U.S. imperialism at home and abroad and the racial and gender constructs that help sustain it.

Such a dialogue is urgently needed and could help open up space for an alternative, life-affirming vision of peace and justice that many can share in creating. This vision stands in stark contrast to the Pentagon's dystopian plans for a future filled with resource wars, climate chaos, seething social tensions, urban counterinsurgency, advanced robotic weaponry, limited nuclear war and so on.

*For more, see [indypendent.org](http://indypendent.org)*

### CONTACT INFO

#### NATIONAL

Buddhist Peace Fellowship: [bpf.org](http://bpf.org)  
Campus Antiwar Network:  
[campusantiwar.net](http://campusantiwar.net)  
Courage to Resist: [couragetoresist.org](http://couragetoresist.org)  
Iraq Veterans Against the War: [ivaw.org](http://ivaw.org)  
Military Families Speak Out: [mfso.org](http://mfso.org)  
People Powered Strategy:

[peoplepowerstrategy.org](http://peoplepowerstrategy.org)  
SDS: [studentsforademocraticsociety.org](http://studentsforademocraticsociety.org)  
Thank You Lt. Wadata: [thankyoult.org](http://thankyoult.org)  
The Occupation Project:  
[vcnv.org/project/the-occupation-project](http://vcnv.org/project/the-occupation-project)  
Troops Out Now Coalition: [troopsoutnow.org](http://troopsoutnow.org)  
UFPJ: [unitedforpeace.org](http://unitedforpeace.org)  
Voices for Creative Non-violence: [vcnv.org](http://vcnv.org)

War Resisters League: [warresisters.org](http://warresisters.org)  
World Can't Wait: [worldcantwait.org](http://worldcantwait.org)  
**LOCAL**  
Bronx Action for Justice and Peace:  
718-548-1145 • [ard1626@hotmail.com](mailto:ard1626@hotmail.com)  
Brooklyn Parents for Peace: 718-624-5921  
[bfp@brooklynpeace.org](mailto:bfp@brooklynpeace.org)  
International Action Center-NYC:

212-633-6646 • [iacenter.org](http://iacenter.org)  
Jersey City Peace Movement:  
201-222-3135  
[jcpeacemovement@hotmail.com](mailto:jcpeacemovement@hotmail.com)  
NYC World Can't Wait: 212-969-0772  
[nyc.worldcantwait.org](http://nyc.worldcantwait.org)  
Prospect Lefferts Voices for Peace and Justice: 718-282-3372





Participants march in this year's World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. Started in 2001, the forum brings together tens of thousands of activists from around the world every year to network and learn from each other's struggles. PHOTO: KENYA.INDYMEDIA.ORG

# World Social Forum Goes to Africa

BY JORDAN FLAHERTY

From Jan. 13-26, tens of thousands of participants, representing nearly every nation and people, gathered to strategize, debate and struggle for solutions to worldwide problems of injustice and inequality at the Annual World Social Forum.

Taking place this year in Nairobi, Kenya, the conference was situated in a massive sports complex neighboring the slum of Korogocho, where tens of thousands of Kenyans live in abject poverty, a contrast to the wealth of many of the conference participants from the so-called “developed world.”

As with many Nairobi slums, Korogocho began when squatters built shacks on empty government land. Most of these original squatters later rented these small structures out to families who pay up to \$10 per month to live in a space with no running water, stolen electricity and the constant threat of government eviction. Nairobi has at least 200 slums, where almost half of its population lives, according to local activists.

During a visit to a small school on the edge of the slum, teachers told me of the conditions under which they work. We talked in one of ten cramped classrooms, less than 10x10 feet, with almost nothing in the way of desks or other basic supplies. These ten rooms and 15 teachers serve 450 children. A hubcap hanging from the wall acts as a school bell. Several of the basic stone rooms have no ceiling. Many of the students are orphans whose parents have died from AIDS. Sewage runs in a river just past the school.

The teachers described concerns around security, as drug addicted armed youth roam through the neighborhood. “We have to shift our hours according to the threat,” Paul, one of the teachers, told me. The police do not enter the camp, which may be for the best, as Kenyan police inspire more fear than the gangs.

“If you see the police coming, you turn the other way as quickly as you can,” Cynthia, a young volunteer with Youth Initiatives Kenya (YIKE), told me. “If they catch you, they will ask for a bribe, and if you can’t pay them, they will lock you up. If you are arrested, you have no rights.” This month, 60 civilians have been killed by the police. There are no investigations into police killings.

Humphrey Otieno, of the Nairobi People’s Settlements Network, another grassroots group active in the slums, also complained of police harassment. “In talking about rights issues, especially with this administration, you can be caught, detained...four of our group are in prison, charged with no proof,” said Otieno. These activists have been held for six months so far, according to Otieno.

Nairobi is a city of contrasts, where those who can afford it live in gated communities, shop at gated stores, and eat at gated restaurants, never seeing the approximately 1.5 million slum dwellers living nearby. Paul, the schoolteacher, told me, “Some people in Nairobi, if you mention to them Korogocho, they will say, ‘Korogocho, is that in Kenya?’”

This year’s Forum happened behind gates and walls and was guarded by heavily armed Kenyan police, a source of much tension at the conference.

Initiated in Brazil in 2001, as a counterpoint to events such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where the rich and powerful gather to make decisions that affect the poor, the World Social Forum was envisioned as an annual gathering of grassroots movements from around the world. Organizers describe it as “an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas... and inter-linking for effective action.”

Among the hundreds of topics presented at the five-day conference were discussions among African youths about democracy and movement building, several presentations on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast sponsored by the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund, workshops on nonviolent strategy and tactics, panels of veterans from Third World liberation struggles, teach-ins on the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara and a workshop called Open Government Through Mass Document Leaking. Africa, which has been underrepresented at past forums, was definitely visible in large numbers this year.

Throughout the week, participants marched and demonstrated on a range of issues, including a march against war in Somalia and a march of disabled Ugandan activists chanting, “You laugh because you think we are different, we laugh because we are the same.”

“These Forums are very important. It’s a time when people can meet from different parts of the world, we can network with

other movements and build solidarity,” legendary Palestinian resistance figure Leila Khaled told me.

Khaled spoke at the Forum’s opening concert, calling for international sanctions against the Israeli state, the closure of Guantanamo prison and for an international struggle against oppression and colonialism.

Outspoken criticism of U.S. policy and imperialism continued throughout the weekend, as Kenyan Forum organizer Oduor Ongwen declared, “One American life should be no more valuable than one Iraqi life. One life of a corporate chief should be equal to the life of one slum dweller.”

Referring to the Ethiopian military presence in neighboring Somalia, Professor Edward Oyugi, another Social Forum organizer, declared, “The war next door is an American war by proxy.”

**CRASHING WSF’S GATED COMMUNITY**

Among the demonstrations at the Forum were daily protests against the Forum itself, especially focused on the high costs of attending the Forum, placing attendance out of reach of most Kenyans.

Conference organizers replied that the Forum already has a sliding scale, where registrants from “Global North” countries such as the United States and Europe pay \$110 while Kenyans pay about seven dollars. Organizers also claim that of the 46,000 people registered for the Forum in the first two days, 7,000 were free scholarships given to Kenyan grassroots organizations.

Despite these assurances, protesters remained dissatisfied, and a contingent of slum dwellers, joined by conference participants, marched through the gates and into the Forum.

At the Forum, everything is up for debate, including the rules of the Forum. As a Ugandan activist said at a Saturday panel called Memories of Resistance, “The question posed here is, do we, the people, want to be architects of our world, or just interior decorators?”

The hope that a better, more just and democratic world can be constructed through these encounters is what lies beneath this gathering.

*Jordan Flaherty is an editor of Left Turn Magazine – [www.leftturn.org](http://www.leftturn.org). He can be reached at [neorleans@leftturn.org](mailto:neorleans@leftturn.org).*

## World briefs

**TARGET: IRAN**

For the first time since 2003, the U.S. is stationing two aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf in an order to send what Dick Cheney described as a “strong signal” to Iran. The military buildup coincides with President Bush’s directive for U.S. forces to assassinate or capture Iranian operatives found in Iraq.

In late January, Israel hosted a major security forum in Herzliya to build public support for an attack on Iran. Speakers included prominent neoconservatives (Richard Perle, James Woolsey), top U.S. and Israeli officials and four U.S. presidential candidates. Democrat candidate John Edwards warned that Iran “threatens the security of Israel and the entire world.” Edwards added, “We need to keep all options on the table, Let me reiterate – all options must remain on the table.”

**GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE DEBATE HEATS UP**

The tide of the global climate change debate is rising on Capital Hill as the new Democratic majority moves to create a global warming committee and legislation by July 4. Top U.S. scientists recently testified to members of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that White House officials pressured them to tailor their opinions on climate change to support the Bush administration’s stance on the subject. More than 6,000 scientists from around the world met in Paris late January to finalize details to a report detailing the first worldwide assessment in six years on the evidence of global warming.



**PAYING UP FOR TORTURE**

The Canadian government has agreed to pay Maher Arar about \$9 million for its role in the U.S. abduction of the Canadian computer scientist. In 2002 U.S. agents seized Arar during a stopover flight in New York. He was secretly flown to Syria where he was jailed and tortured. Initially, the U.S. and Canada claimed Arar had ties to Al Qaeda but Canada now admits he was innocent. The Bush administration, however, is refusing to apologize to Arar or remove him from its terrorist watch list.

**U.S. STEPS UP SOMALIA AIR STRIKES**

The U.S. military has admitted it carried out a second round of airstrikes in Somalia opening up a new front in the so-called war on terror.

The strikes on Jan. 8 and Jan. 25 occurred just weeks after U.S.-backed Ethiopian troops invaded Somalia and toppled the Islamic Courts Union.

The U.S. military says the target of the strikes were members of Al Qaeda connected to the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

But Oxfam reports that the bombing raids actually killed about 70 nomadic herdsman. Vital water sources for the region were also disrupted.





A Nai Lai resident casts his net at sunrise. Fishermen here earn roughly the same amount as local wage laborers, like the ones employed to build resorts, but they work about half as much and are free to set their own hours. PHOTO: VIRGINIA LEAVELL

BY VIRGINIA LEAVELL

Nai Lai, THAILAND—Halima Singkala, 49, and her neighbors were repairing fishing nets when thirty soldiers marched into their village on a bright March morning nearly two years ago. Residents were still recovering from the massive tsunami that had struck just three months prior, but these officials brought guns, not relief, to this southern Thai fishing village. Singkala and her neighbors were ordered to vacate the property immediately: according to the soldiers, their newly constructed homes were built on land they no longer owned.

“We screamed. We yelled ‘get out!’ Where else could we go?” Singkala recalls, describing how she helped defend the homes with her orphaned grandson on her hip. The women were unarmed, their husbands still out on their morning catch, but their aggressive resistance to the soldiers’ orders to leave saved their homes that day.

#### OPEN FOR BUSINESS?

The tsunami hit on Dec. 26, 2004 after a seafloor earthquake of 9.3 magnitude forced billions of tons of seawater up from its epicenter and sent sets of mammoth waves onto the shores of South and Southeast Asia and Africa, claiming more than 200,000 lives.

Villagers in Nai Lai saw the wave coming. They gathered their children and ran, and, although their homes and mosques were destroyed, only one villager died. Many attribute the relatively slow onslaught of the wave to a buffer of mangrove trees and coastline forests.

In the aftermath of the disaster, government soldiers weren’t the only new visitors in this sleepy Muslim community. Today, the village is littered with traces of international aid organizations. NGOs have blazed crosses and logos on roadside trash cans, and villagers sport faded tsunami volunteer T-shirts.

Some of the aid efforts have been successful: new houses were built and some families now grow hydroponic vegetables in the many plastic stations donated by a Greek NGO. But along with the blessing of aid has come a new threat which could change life along the Andaman Coast even more dramatically than the tsunami: Disaster Capitalism.

After Hurricane Mitch in Central America, Katrina on the American Gulf Coast and the tsunami here on the Andaman Coast, this opportunistic development model has been spreading.

As Phuket real estate agent Krista Hunter illustrated in an interview with *London’s Observer*: “[The tsunami] has helped put Phuket and south Thailand on the map. Most of the beaches became more desirable when the old buildings and homes were swept away and replaced with new ones.”

Panon Butakeaw, a legal worker with the Andaman Community Rights and Legal Aid Center, says Thailand’s post-tsunami land issues aren’t unique. “Developers have taken villagers’ land in many coastal communities hit by the tsunami, and other communities are resisting just the same.”

Just months after the tsunami hit, with most recovery efforts still in their early stages, the Tourism Authority of Thailand cheerfully reported that the country was “open for business.” But the government’s promotion of tourism development has no pretense of livelihood preservation. The disaster instead opened up many new avenues for corporate investment in the south. Many fishing communities like Nai Lai have lost ancestral homes to eviction and government land sales to developers since the disaster.

#### “NONE AS FREE AS THIS”

Singkala’s neighbor, Naisuthin Leebumroong, is a fisherman and part-time community organizer. He leaves home in his boat at 5 o’clock most mornings, guns through the

hanging mangrove forests, and rides out to sea. He catches crab, fish, squid, rays, and sometimes sharks. He doesn’t bring in as much as before the tsunami, but he can earn enough to help support his family.

Besides, other work just isn’t as appealing. “I’ve had a lot of jobs”, he says, “but none as free as this.”

Like most fishermen, Leebumroong marks his sea nets with buoys. Unlike most he ties them with yellow flags that say “Thaksin, get out!”

The recently ousted Prime Minister won few hearts with his disaster response. The official government response in the area sometimes prohibited residents from rebuilding on their original land. While developers were quick to arrive on the scene following the tsunami, government aid was often slow to arrive, if it came at all; this lack of assistance may have motivated the desperate decision some villagers made to sell off their ancestral lands.

In Nai Lai, much of the aid money from international organizations — funneled through local government — has yet to reach survivors. Families that were promised 30,000 baht (\$800 US) each plus 15,000 baht (\$400) per school-aged child have seen little sign of it. One grandmother, visited by an aid worker, was offered a single 100-baht bill (\$2.70). She declined.

The Thai government has liquidated public land holdings in tsunami-affected areas. In Nai Lai, the local government has sold 240 acres of public land to developers, and 1800 acres has been bought from villagers. Many report being tricked into handing over their property to visitors claiming to hold their land titles or represent the government. Singkala and her neighbors are still unsure of how their land was sold out from under them.

In response to questionable land transfers, villagers like Leebumroong have been trained by the Andaman Community Rights and Legal Aid Center to do basic legal education in their villages.

“It’s better if they can teach themselves,” says Panom Butakeaw, who visits villages and organizes regional weekend trainings for community members. The Center’s work, he explains, helps villagers understand their rights and the law so they can organize themselves and determine their own future.

“When villagers see their common problem and begin to struggle together,” says Butakeaw, “they are stronger.”

#### FIGHTING TOGETHER

Since surviving the tsunami, villagers have struggled to preserve the lives they knew before. In the face of abandonment from their government, many communities have joined the Assembly of the Poor, the network behind Thailand’s people’s movement. Nai Lai regularly sends villagers twelve hours north to Bangkok for meetings and protests.

From Bangkok, a solid alliance has sprung up between southern survivors and Thailand’s national slum network which represents other portions of the population who feel they must champion for them-

selves. Representatives from the network trucked down after the tsunami to help rebuild, and have since joined forces in protesting for land rights. One Bangkok organizer moved down to Nai Lai for the year after the tsunami to help the community rebuild and move forward.

“We have the same goals,” Kovit Boonjear, a slum community organizer in northeastern Thailand, says of the alliance. “It makes sense that we fight together.”

If they don’t, Nai Lai might start looking a lot like Phuket. Sixty kilometers away the city of Phuket is brimming with luxury hotels. The whole area is a busy construction site for expensive homes and resorts, where many villagers now work as builders and landscapers. The industry welcomes the labor of villagers who have lost access to the sea or have been otherwise pushed out by tourism. Most have no idea what companies are behind the construction, as usually only local middlemen are on the ground. Amari, a five star resort and spa chain in Thailand, is one company organizers have reason to think is looking to build in the area.

“Thais build the resorts, but only foreigners live in them,” says Leebumroong, who has had odd jobs doing landscaping for the new subdivisions. He worries about the often-overlooked impact of newcomers on the local environment and fisheries. “Our two worlds can’t coexist,” he says. “One destroys the other.”

#### “WE’RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE.”

Newly politicized, many villagers find themselves fishing a little less and meeting a little more. Though the military has returned three times in the past year, the Nai Lai villagers have made sure not to be caught off guard again, and they’ve succeeded in staving off the soldiers each time. Many residents are optimistic that last September’s coup against Thaksin Shinawatra’s government will mean that the soldiers won’t return, or if they do, they won’t be prepared to use force to evict villagers.

There are even rumors of the government being of some help, but villagers are skeptical. They know what they’re up against, because they know how high in demand gorgeous corners of the world like theirs are. Nai Lai’s postcard beach, with its white sands, shady mangroves and glittering turquoise sea, is not one easily overlooked by the Thai government’s development schemes and business relationships.

To outsiders, it might seem that the tsunami waves would have washed away these coastal communities. But on the ground, a movement of fisherfolk and their allies grows stronger and unites around clear demands. In nearby Nam Khem, fifty residents are currently fighting in court for the right to return to their land. The Nai Lai villagers promise that developers can expect to meet a well-organized resistance to any village-removal schemes.

Naisuthin laughs at the prospect: “We’re not going anywhere.”

For more see: [www.commonlanguageproject.net](http://www.commonlanguageproject.net)



FILM  
Back in  
the GDR

THE DECOMPOSITION  
OF THE SOUL  
DIR. MASSIMO IANNETTA  
AND NINA TOUSSAINT, 2002

OPENS AT FILM FORUM FEB. 7  
FOR A 2-WEEK RUN

DECOMPOSITION: OPERATIVE  
METHOD USED BY STATE  
SECURITY TO EFFICIENTLY  
FIGHT SUBVERSIVE ACTION.

Given this definition, from the East German secret police department's Dictionary of Operative Work, *The Decomposition of the Soul*, a Belgian-produced documentary about the former East German police state, couldn't be better titled.

Opening with the sound of wind on empty institutional grounds (establishing a chill that stays with us throughout), the film features interviews with two former detainees at Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, the central political prison of the former German Democratic Republic. Established in 1945 as an internment camp by operatives of the NKVD, the predecessor to the KGB, it was converted one year later to the central "preventive [pretrial] prison" for political dissidents and held the distinction of containing more interrogation rooms than cells. Operated by East German secret police (the "Stasi"), which counted 90,000 official and an estimated 300,000 "non-official" collaborators, the prison was part of what is widely regarded as one of the most effective intelligence systems in history.

Detained for helping others cross the Berlin Wall, one man and one woman recount the many hours of interrogation, sleep deprivation, humiliation and mock trials that preceded conviction and more "traditional" imprisonment. Remon Froment's camera follows them silently through the empty rooms, still marked with signs of human presence — an empty teacup, some lumps of sugar. Unmoving, suspenseful visuals have a hypnotic effect, exacerbating the sheer weight of the spoken words.

The documentary is Orwellian to the core, simultaneously dated and eerily futuristic both in visuals and subject, and exploits this to its advantage. Though the bleak environs could easily belong to some underfunded Soviet school or hospital, nothing in the decrepit buildings is accidental — windows let in light but are too thick to see through; light switches are ineffectual. There truly is no darkness and nowhere to hide — your fellow prisoners are probably informing on you as well.



Toumani from Mali, who lives in the Bronx. PHOTO: DANNY GOLDFIELD

ART  
A City View of the World's Children

Danny Goldfield plans to photograph one child from every country on the planet — without stepping foot outside New York City.

A former art director for films and television commercials, Goldfield has snapped portraits of immigrant kids from 136 countries since founding the project NYChildren in 2004. Now he is working with volunteers to track down 58 more subjects — families with roots in tiny or isolated places like North Korea, Vanuatu and Seychelles. (A complete list is posted on the project website, [www.nychildren.org](http://www.nychildren.org)) Photo shoots have taken him all over the five boroughs, from a public housing project to a penthouse owned by a wealthy lesbian couple. But many of his subjects are the children of middle class workers — ordinary citizens who are "thriving," Goldfield

says, despite financial struggle. One is the daughter of an Uzbek barber, for instance, and another is the child of a South Korean pastor who recently moved to Tennessee.

While these children don't seem to have much in common, Goldfield has made it his mission to help their communities find common ground. In 2005, subjects mingled at an exhibit in a Brooklyn cafe, where Goldfield says they danced and played, seemingly unaware of cultural stereotypes. Now, the artist-cum-activist has outlined plans on his website for a program that will help families arrange play dates for their children. When the project is complete (next summer, Goldfield hopes), subjects from all 194 countries will gather again at the final exhibition.

In this way, NYChildren is able to transcend its current confinement to the internet and

have a concrete impact on what Jacob Riis called the city's "other half." Unlike Riis, though — who used his camera to expose the squalid living conditions in Lower East Side tenements — Goldfield leaves the harsh realities of political and economic divide almost entirely out of the picture. In less skilled hands, this effect might have come across as stagy and unrealistic. But Goldfield's beautifully composed portraits capture poignant, personal moments, and the universal emotions that come with them: a West African girl wincing as a relative tightly braids her hair, or an Algerian boy bending over in prayer in a Brooklyn mosque.

Because NYChildren lacks broader political context, viewers might find themselves wondering what spurred participants to flee their homelands for New York in the first place, or whether they have faced any obstacles in their pursuit of the proverbial American Dream. The project is narrower in scope than, for example, Meter Menzel's brilliant 1994 book *Material World*, which uses portraits of families surrounded by all of their belongings to address global class differences. Menzel devoted about eight pages worth of photographs and text to each featured family, so that readers could acquaint themselves with the people behind the possessions; Goldfield, on the other hand, insists that his subjects' stories are not his to tell — and that he isn't trying to make a political statement.

It is ironic, then, that some of his most fascinating snapshots seem rich with symbolism. One of the most memorable ones shows a Malaysian girl gleefully clutching a plastic spoon with a pair of chopsticks, as if striking an ideal balance between assimilation and cultural pride. Her portrait, and all of the others, seem to suggest that each immigrant is reaching for a distinct and personal human dream — American or otherwise.

Photos posted at [www.nychildren.org](http://www.nychildren.org).

—LIANA GREY

Hohenschönhausen (its name translates to "beautiful village on a hill") continued operating until days before the Berlin Wall fell, reaching a final crescendo of panic in which officials attempted to destroy records, tearing files by hand when shredders collapsed under the load. The memories of just two former prisoners, however, provide a trove of painstaking detail to carry the narrative. The single document the film relies on is the Stasi Dictionary of Political Operative Work, whose definitions and interrogation tactics, read aloud throughout the film, provide a chilling backdrop of governmental doublespeak. This is the one area in which an appreciation of German and its hypercompound noun structures would help in understanding the film, as the English subtitles fall short of conveying this linguistic complexity.

The film's most unnerving quality is its quiet demonstration of the after effects of torture outside the prison: former detainees, including the two we meet, continued to be watched after their release, even in the West. Ex-prisoner Jürgen Fuchs, whose poetic writings are interspersed throughout the film, specu-

lated before his death in 1999 from a rare type of leukemia that he had been deliberately irradiated during his detention in the prison. He had.

Even as Hohenschönhausen is converted into a memorial, this austere first effort from writer-directors Massimo Iannetta and Nina Toussaint reads as warning of both a past and a future much too close for comfort.

—IRINA IVANOVA

BOOKS  
Bosnian War  
Drawn Out

THE FIXER: A STORY  
FROM SARAJEVO

BY JOE SACCO  
DRAWN & QUARTERLY, 2003

Ferociously honest texts that change our perception of the world and ourselves are rare. Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* are but two examples that create unforget-

table worlds focused on the people behind the stories. In *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo*, Joe Sacco continues this tradition in the medium of a graphic novel.

Author of the groundbreaking comic series *Palestine*, illustrator

and journalist Sacco penned a tome of misery and humanity with *The Fixer*. Sacco returns to a personal, potent yet half forgotten moment of the Twentieth Century — the Bosnian War.

*continued on next page*





## Bi is Beautiful

continued from previous page

In a deserted hotel lobby Sacco meets Neven, a chain-smoking, hard-drinking native of Sarajevo, Bosnia. Neven guides the author to smoky café bars, pool halls filled with regulars and debris-cluttered streets that were scenes of war. A former member of a paramilitary outfit with connections to nefarious figures, Neven was in a ripe position to “find [for] war correspondents the human tragedies that make news editors happy.” In other words, a fixer. From arranging prostitutes for foreign journalists to paying locals with beer to retell their post-war ordeals, the moral implications of a fixer’s job are dubious at best.

The fixer himself serves as the center of the tragic maelstrom, and through him we get to know some of the “defenders of Sarajevo,” such as Ismet Bajramovic, a.k.a. Celo. With a history of drug dealing and explosive violence, he became a charismatic paramilitary leader. We also meet Musan Topalovic, a.k.a. Caco, a former folk musician with no criminal past turned paramilitary leader whose “exploits became the stuff of legend and myth.” The war-torn city is characterized by images of a desolate Holiday Inn splayed against a bombed-out section of the city. Against this backdrop Neven scavenges the terrain for physical and psychological sustenance.

The interconnected stories crisscross through time: from 2001 to 1991 to 1995 with the point of view shifting seamlessly from first person to second and back. At times the panels swim across the page; at others they are bruised photographs tossed in a forgotten scrapbook. The overall effect is a powerful mosaic of exploitation, absurdity, humor and violence. The author’s obsessive attention to minutiae, exhibited through his meticulous crosshatching, is comparable to his drive to “get the story.” He gives as much care to the stitching in a sweater as he does to the sullen faces in a crowd. Although Joe Sacco distances himself from the fully-rendered subject of the book by caricaturizing himself, his constant presence, rendered with simple lines and textures, is a nice change from the “objectivity” that most journalists assume.

In the end this black-and-white graphic novel presents a malleable world of gray where everyone’s goal is survival at any cost. With *The Fixer*, Joe Sacco reinforces his place as a comics master and journalist, and his work merits examination and celebration.

—HUESO TAVERAS

Jennifer Baumgardner looks both ways, which in her parlance means that she sleeps with both men and women. Her latest book explores what it means to be bisexual. While it is provocative and entertaining, it sidesteps several important aspects of American sexual pathology, which renders it less comprehensive than it might have been.

The book merges memoir, cultural critique and polemic with a “look-who-I’ve-slept-with” bravura. Along the way, it attempts to deconstruct bisexual behavior and elbow its place onto feminist and queer agendas. Time will tell whether this gives the “B” in LGBTQ organizations more clout or adds bisexual demands to feminist wish-lists.

“Bisexuality, like feminism, has freedom at its root,” Baumgardner writes, “the need to have more, not less, to say ‘and’ not ‘or.’” She sees bisexuality’s political invisibility as a reflection of society’s love of the binary and desire to keep things simple — straight or gay, normal or deviant.

Of course, life is rarely this cut-and-dry. Baumgardner heralds public figures like Ani DiFranco, Anne Heche and Alice Walker as exemplars of sexual freedom, because they have publicly affirmed their bisexuality. This, she argues, forces conversations open. Furthermore, it shifts the domestic paradigm, creating what she calls “gay expectations” — intimacy, openness and female orgasms — in straight relationships, and “straight expectations” — visibility, marriage, children — in queer ones.

In some ways she’s right, and celebrities are to be commended any time they publicly declare their identity or politics. Nonetheless, I’m not 100 percent sold on the argument. The

chasm between superstars and regular folks is enormous, and their example is no more likely to lead to tolerance than Ciara’s ode to abstinence, a song called *Goodies*, will slam a psychic chastity belt on horny adolescents.

Similarly, when Baumgartner writes that, “College campuses are good barometers

Yet in all spheres, people do check each other out, and anyone or anything that encourages openness is to be lauded. Baumgardner’s assessment of her own relationships illustrates what it means to adopt a consciously chosen identity. Honest and forthright, she questions whether the Jennifer who dates men is “just a straight girl,” then analyzes what “just” means. Her candor is refreshing.

At the same time, I wished that she had paid less attention to Freudian missteps and turned, instead, to helping people appreciate the continuum of desire and concomitant behavior at the core of human existence. Such understanding might mitigate the trend of men denying that they have sex with other men in order to preserve the illusion of heterosexuality. It might also allow those who eschew monogamy to talk about ways to safely love multiple partners, a topic that tends to be avoided despite many people’s forays in this terrain.

Despite these flaws, *Look Both Ways* is important. Sassy, bold and cleverly written, Baumgardner celebrates bisexual women as major players in the pro-sex feminist movement. Likewise, she reminds us that political and psychic liberation are entwined, that social reorganization requires that we address the impulses that goad our behavior. Lastly, she revels in her power to attract and go after what and whom she wants. The power to objectify, coupled with subverting the male gaze, can be heady. Take it, she tells us, and don’t look back.

—ELEANOR J. BADER



of this moment in history” because they are rife with bisexual exploration, she is getting only part of the story. According to the American Council on Education, less than half of U.S. residents get college degrees. What’s more, commuter schools, including community colleges, are vastly different from institutions in which students live in dorms; the experimentation rampant at Princeton or Smith is far less likely at Nassau Community College.

## Married to the Left

Freud famously wrote that a man’s first love is his mother and each woman afterward is a prism through which he loves a new view of her. I was wary of his theory until my mom was retelling stories of her 1960s activism, and it sounded like my life right now. How did the Left become a substitute for my mother?

For my mom, activism was an escape from a closed-in Puerto Rican family and a mother who said she was born too dark. Even as she grew older and lighter she saw herself as small and ugly. The Left gave her a larger world that said “Black is beautiful.” When the movement collapsed in the Seventies, the reason for her life fell with it and she began to doubt her body and her politics. She was drifting, and I wanted to save her from the fatigue of being lost.

We began a silent war. She got a nosejob to fix herself “white.” I soaked in the sun to be brown as a peanut. She straightened her hair. I let mine lock into dreads that swung like chains binding me to the slaves in our blood. If she scowled at my hair, I’d only date sistas who flaunted Afro-puffs, twists, cornrows and Nubian dreads a la Jada Pinket in *The Matrix*; each style being another angle on the Black pride she left in the sixties.

When she was fired from Manchester Community College for organizing welfare mothers to retrieve book money cut from the state budget, I vowed to be paid in full for being progressive. Each of her political

defeats became a life passion. After fighting her for years I’ve achieved a small measurable success. The price is I’m now married to the Left.

I am more conservative than my mom. My love for her was always greater than my love for the Left. Ideas never impressed me; emotions, not thoughts, were my compass. Leftism felt like a maze and to find her I followed a convoluted map of ideology. I found the center of it to give her a son she can be proud of. Now the question arises: was love worth the lie of acting more Left than I am?

It’s too late for me to answer. Instead I accept that what is true about lies is not what they say but our need to tell them. And I’ve gotten so good at it that Leftist ideology is fun. I can raise my fist knowing that it grabs hold of a higher law. My passion is legalized. It scares people and I get strength from their fear. But now, after years of rhetoric, the Left’s embarrassing ineffectiveness is scaring me.

At the city-flooding antiwar march of 2003, I was in Times Square. Cops panicked as we rocked the barricades. We pushed through into the street, eager to go further when a headline slid across the large Times Square screen, “George Bush and Tony Blair halt war against Iraq in response to global outcry.” We cheered with one voice. Weeks later, Baghdad glowed with bomb explosions.

Lately our ineffectiveness, our selfish fear is not only embarrassing, it’s dangerous. After I breathed ash on 9/11 and waded through a flooded New

Orleans handing food to homeless families, after seeing Sean Bell’s grey face as he lay in a coffin it has become painfully clear that the people we talk of saving need more than words. So I went to D.C. to march again, but the knowledge is rising that it’s time to risk more than my voice — it’s time to risk my life.

The last time I saw my mom in Boston she’d gone natural. She was so proud. I rubbed her hair; it was tight, curly and soft. It was hers, all hers. My mom claimed her body and its history. When I congratulated her, my left-wing revolutionary voice felt like a wedding ring around my throat. But when I returned to New York and to my work, it began to feel like a slave collar.

The Left is my wife. She’s tired of theory but loves to talk in abstractions. She marches in circles while our leaders murder the world. She claims their victims as private property and uses their blood to deepen the red of our flag. She’s gone vegan. She’s always been brown but now feels okay about it. Sometimes she jokes of shooting whites and/or capitalists. She’s always asking for money.

Not long ago, sometimes even still, I would’ve accepted the state of affairs to keep the faith. Now her 9/11 conspiracy theories, tribal fetishes and self-righteous guilt feel like betrayals of my political origin, that love is a universal need. The Left is my best friend. I love her. I just don’t know how to show it anymore.

## commentary

BY NICHOLAS POWERS



## Last Song for Alice Coltrane

Alice Coltrane, who died Jan. 12 at the age of 69, created some of the most furiously chaotic and serenely spiritual music in the history of jazz. Although best known as the widow of the great John Coltrane — she played piano in his last band — she also recorded at least one masterpiece on her own, her 1970 album *Ptah the El Daoud*. Along with Sun Ra and her fellow Coltrane collaborators, Pharoah Sanders and McCoy Tyner, Alice Coltrane was one of the key musicians who brought Indian, African, and Middle Eastern tonalities and rhythms into jazz. She was also one of the rare women instrumentalists prominent in jazz, a field that has had fewer women actually creating the music than even the notoriously macho genres of hip-hop and heavy metal.

Born Alice McLeod, she grew up in a musical family in Detroit, also playing organ, harp and vibraphone. “She could have been one of the true giants on vibes,” said bandleader Terry Gibbs, with whom she played in the early sixties. She met John Coltrane in 1963, when the Gibbs band opened for him. They were married in 1965, and she joined his band after Tyner left the next year.

John Coltrane at the time was playing some of the most intense and dissonant music ever created by a significantly popular American musician,

both leading and following the free-jazz revolutionaries blowing out of the Lower East Side. Yet it was also intensely spiritual, questing music; his 1966 album *Meditations* roils and howls furiously for almost 20 minutes before settling down into a track called “Serenity.” Struggling hard to achieve peace seemed to be its message, one that resonated with Black activists, post-beatnik and ghetto poets and the more adventurous white psychedelic-rock musicians.

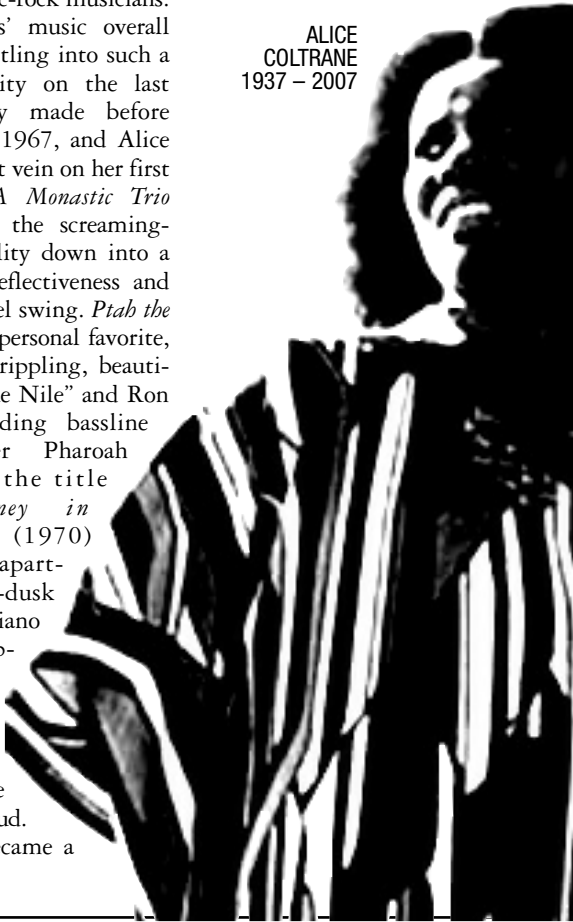
The Coltranes’ music overall seemed to be settling into such a hard-won serenity on the last recordings they made before John’s death in 1967, and Alice continued in that vein on her first solo albums. *A Monastic Trio* (1968) brought the screaming-for-freedom quality down into a frame of raga reflectiveness and modal jazz-gospel swing. *Ptah the El Daoud* is my personal favorite, with Coltrane’s rippling, beautiful harp on “Blue Nile” and Ron Carter’s descending bassline walking under Pharoah Sanders’ sax on the title track. *Journey in Satchidananda* (1970) blended the apartment-at-winter-dusk warmth of jazz piano with the hypnotic drone of the Indian tanpura and the meditative plucking of the Middle Eastern oud.

After she became a

follower of Indian guru Swami Satchidananda, her music became more exclusively devotional. “Everything I do is an offering to God,” she told *Jazz & Pop* magazine in 1968. Two years later, she’d write of trying to create “an ancient, sacred sound.”

She eventually quit the commercial jazz world to dedicate herself to religious music, though she returned in 2004 for a last album, *Translinear Light*, recorded with her saxophonist son Ravi.

ALICE COLTRANE  
1937 – 2007



## letters to the editor

*Continued from page 2*

### RESPONSES TO A.K. GUPTA'S IRAQ ARTICLE

*A.K. Gupta's analysis of the unwillingness of Democratic leaders to end the war in Iraq ("Antiwar Dems Say Yes to Empire," Jan. 10, 2007) sparked a heated debate on Independent.org.*

The writer is needlessly attacking the Democrats, who, aside from a couple antiwar rallies, are the only barrier against the Bush plan. The Dems are rightly going to pass a resolution against the war and test the waters for broader action in Congress against the war. Dems must take a cautious approach in cutting funding of the war to avoid damaging “selling-out-the-troops” rhetoric that will/is coming from the White House. As a liberal, I hope this happens, but the timing must be right. It is easy for those like the writer to take shots from the sidelines at the Dems. The Dems were elected to take this war head on, but we must be thoughtful and smart about how we do it.

—BLUE STATE DEMOCRAT

As long as no viable left alternative exists that threatens their stranglehold

over the masses of working people, the Democrats will continue to take the liberal left’s support for granted and go on supporting the war, Israel, “globalization,” etc. And that will continue for as long as the reformist lesser-evillists, who believe that any social change in this country, on any issue, has to come from within the Democratic Party, are allowed to dominate what passes for a left in this country. So, by all means hit the streets on Jan. 27 and March 19 but connect the movement against the war to a fight to build an independent working-class alternative to both bosses’ parties.

—ROY ROLLIN

*A.K. Gupta responds:*

Why won’t [the Democrats] confront the imperial presidency? Because despite the blunders of Vietnam and now Iraq, it works well for the economic elite. Having power centered in one narrow institution headed by one powerful individual allows the state to quickly deploy power in the interests of the elite. Having foreign policy and war-making decided by hundreds of voices in Congress, which is what is supposed to happen, is messy and time consuming and far less likely to result in action. Of course this would be great for the

majority of Americans and even more so the world, but it doesn’t serve the interests of Empire.

Take a look at history, it has only been those movements willing to confront power with power that made real change happen. Do you think the Vietnam War ended because of some marches, letter writing and pleading with elected representatives? It ended because of the civilian and military antiwar movements that revolted against the state and made the war too difficult to continue.

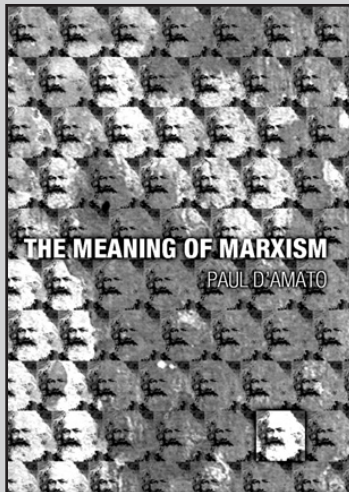
### LETTER FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

I enjoy your paper. Keep up the great work of exposing corrupt government. The problem with government is that they are not organized in any fundamental way to actually create reasonable righteous self-respect to any human dignity. All they are doing is being self-centered and prejudicial to everyone that doesn’t meet their standard. And what is that standard? Actually they have no idea themselves. God Bless Ya’ll.

—ROBERT F. CALDWELL  
MICHAEL UNIT  
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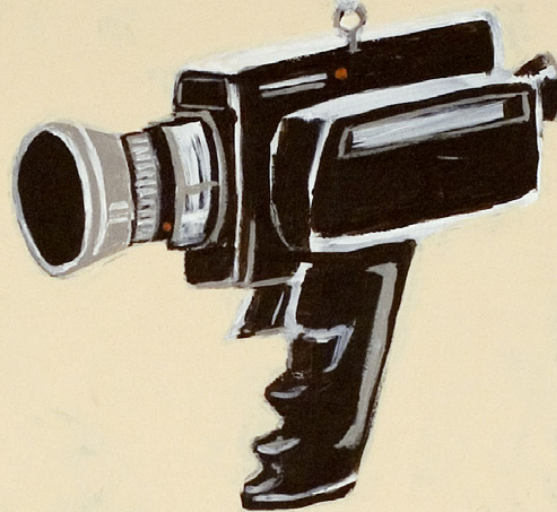


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